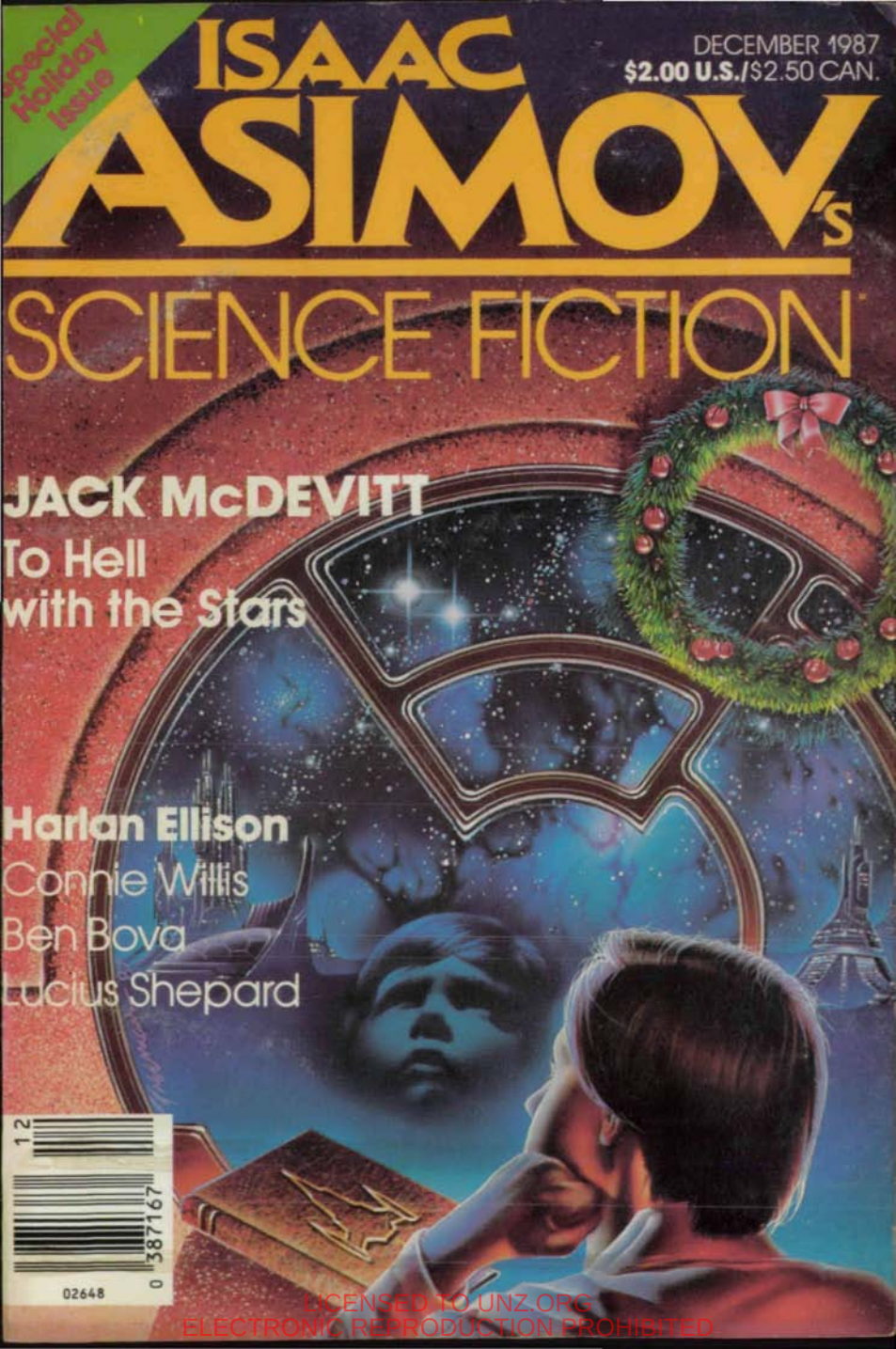
Special Holiday Issue

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION

DECEMBER 1987
$2.00 U.S./$2.50 CAN.

JACK McDEVITT
To Hell with the Stars

Harlan Ellison
Connie Willis
Ben Bova
Lucius Shepard



12
0 387167
02648

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In 1982, Lisa Goldstein gave us the American Book Award-winning *The Red Magician*.

In 1985, she gave us the critically-acclaimed *The Dream Years*.

Now she gives us her most accomplished work to date.

A MASK FOR THE GENERAL

BY

LISA GOLDSTEIN

A haunting novel of an all-too-possible future and of the power within each of us to change our world.

BANTAM SPECTRA
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The heroes of the far future are the daring captains who cross the galaxy with the rarest cargoes of a hundred worlds.

The *Star Traders* game brings you the excitement of travel and trade, as two to six players race for wealth. In the end, only one player will be named the Imperial Trader.

Skill and planning are needed to locate your stations. But the "Trader's Luck" cards make every trip a chancy one. You can lose a cargo — or gain prestige and Imperial favor!

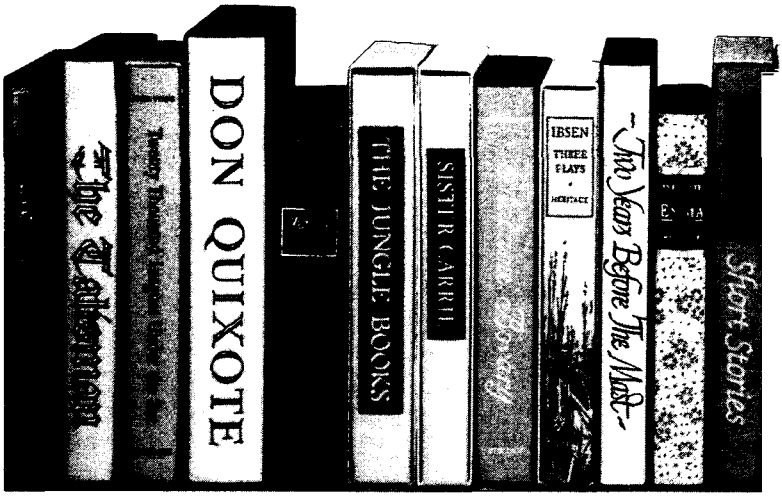
The *Isaac Asimov Presents: Star Traders* game is available at your favorite toy, hobby or book store for $19.95.

If your local store doesn't carry *Star Traders* you can order it by mail. Add $1.55 for postage and handling. Texas residents please add $1.44 sales tax. Please allow four weeks for delivery. Our catalog is free.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES
Box 18957-J Austin, TX 78760

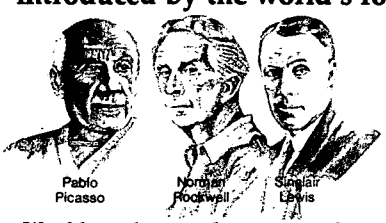
Star Traders is a trademark of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. *Isaac Asimov Presents* is a trademark of Davis Publications, Inc., used under license. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Now You Can Own the Most Important Editions of Our Time

Heritage Club classics illustrated, designed and introduced by the world's foremost artists and literary figures.



Would you be proud to own a volume illustrated by Picasso?

The Heritage Club has, for several decades, commissioned leading artists to illustrate its editions. Pablo Picasso, for instance, was commissioned to create the drawings which illustrate the ancient Greek comedy, *Lysistrata*. The original works are now part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

In a wholly different vein, The Heritage Club commissioned Norman Rockwell to illustrate *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Who could better portray the inexperience of youth and the innocence of a bygone era? Today, these Norman Rockwell originals are as classic as Twain's novels themselves.

Introductions by leading literary figures of the twentieth century.

Often, the writer who introduces a Heritage Club volume is as famous as the author who wrote the work. Sinclair Lewis, Thornton Wilder and A.A. Milne are just a few of the prominent literary figures who have been chosen to write introductions. Imagine having Theodore Dreiser tell you what to read for in *The Way of All Flesh* ... or having Isaac Asimov set the stage for *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

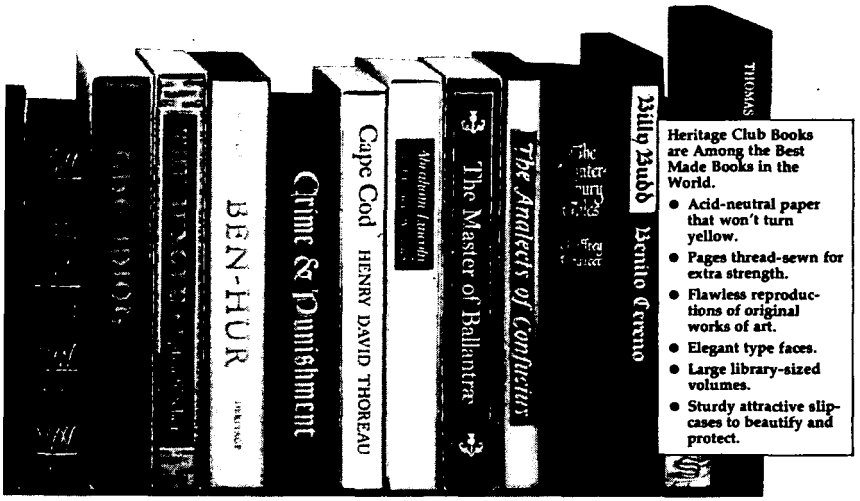
Definitive editions that withstand the test of time.

Heritage Club editions have come to be regarded as *definitive* editions of the world's great classics. Over the years, The Heritage Club has sought the talents of the world's foremost artists, typographers, designers, binders, and printers to produce volumes which are as classic as the immortal literary works they contain.

Remember when books were made to last? Heritage Club editions still are!

Nothing is more discouraging than to pay up to $25-30 for an ordinary hardcover best-seller and find that the book is printed on poor-quality paper and that the pages are merely glued to the binding. Heritage Club editions, on the other hand, are produced the way they always have been — to last for generations.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Heritage Club Books are Among the Best Made Books in the World.

- **Acid-neutral paper that won't turn yellow.**
- **Pages thread-sewn for extra strength.**
- **Flawless reproductions of original works of art.**
- **Elegant type faces.**
- **Large library-sized volumes.**
- **Sturdy attractive slipcases to beautify and protect.**

CHOOSE A FREE FIRST BOOK!

Seeing is believing. To see, first-hand, the beauty and quality of these classic editions, indicate your choice below and include this list with your application:

The Notorious Jumping Frog & Other Stories, Mark Twain;

Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll, with original illustrations by Sir John Tenniel;

Hamlet, William Shakespeare;

The Mayor of Casterbridge, Thomas Hardy, with engravings by Agnes Miller Parker;

A Journey to the Center of the Earth, Jules Verne, Introduced by Isaac Asimov.

Not a book club in a conventional sense.

There is nothing conventional about the way The Heritage Club operates. Choices are made by you, and not for you. When you enroll, you receive a *Prospectus* of upcoming Club titles. *You tell us which titles you wish to receive*, which are then sent to you at the rate of one title per month. And even though you receive only titles you have specifically requested, you are free to return any volume within 30 days for a full refund. *You are also at liberty to cancel your membership at any time.*

Please act promptly.

Sooner or later, the generous terms of this introductory offer must bow to the still rising costs of making books. To accept this invitation, simply complete the Membership Application and return it promptly. This is all you need to do to begin acquiring your own magnificent library of the world's greatest books in editions you will be proud to own.

Membership Application 293

THE HERITAGE CLUB
47 Richards Avenue
Norwalk, Conn. 06857

No Payment Required
Simply mail this application.

YES! *I want to join The Heritage Club and begin* building my own personal library of the greatest books of all time.

Send me my FREE first volume. Assuming this book is satisfactory, I will then send $17.50 (plus shipping and handling) to pay for the next volume in my Heritage library. This price will be guaranteed to me for the next two years. I will continue to receive a volume per month for as long as I continue my membership. I understand that I may return any book within 30 days for a refund, and that either party may cancel this subscription agreement at any time.

If the first volume does not meet with my approval, I agree to return it. I will then owe you nothing and my membership will automatically be canceled.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss_____

Address_____

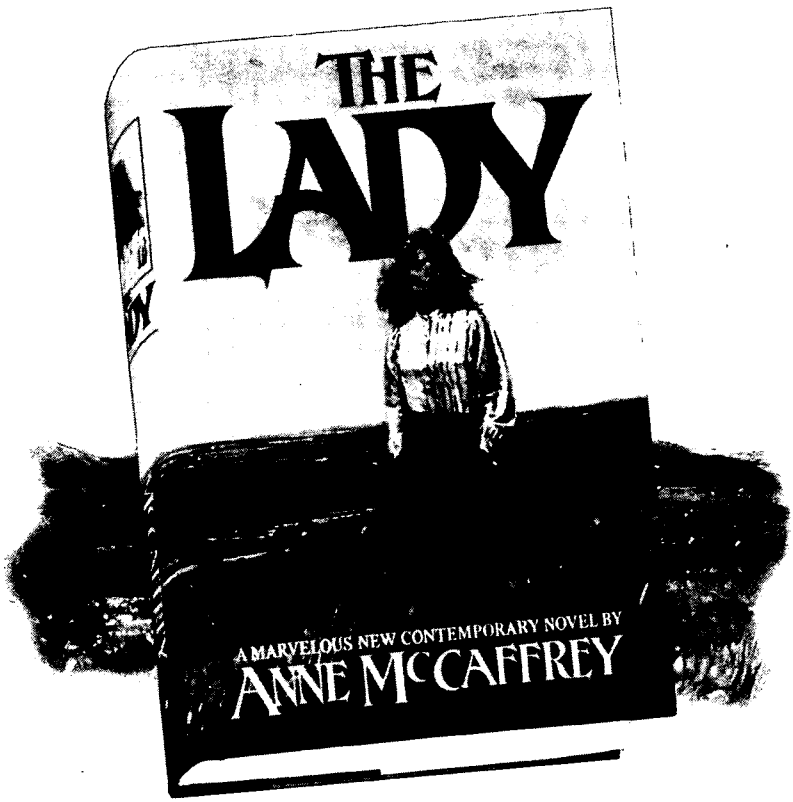
City_____

State_____ Zip_____

Signature_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anne McCaffrey's first big contemporary saga!



On her family's farm in Ireland, thirteen-year-old Catriona Carradyne yearned to ride the show horses her family was famous for. Her neighbor, Selina Healey, yearned to escape from her miserable marriage. Catriona saw her ambitions and accomplishments grow... and forbidden love grow between Selina and her father.

The same storytelling gifts that made *Moreta* and *The White Dragon* bestsellers make THE LADY a heartwarming triumph of contemporary storytelling!

A Ballantine Hardcover *On Sale in November $17.95*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 11 No. 12 (whole number 124)
December 1987
Next issue on sale
November 17, 1987

Serial

110 I, Robot: The Movie
(Part Two of Three) — Harlan Ellison

Novelettes

24 Winter's Tale — Connie Willis
50 Shades — Lucius Shepard

Short Stories

18 To Hell with the Stars — Jack McDevitt
85 Shalamari — Marc Laidlaw
96 Silent Night — Ben Bova

Departments

6 Editorial: Memory — Isaac Asimov
10 Letters
16 Gaming — Matthew J. Costello
192 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Cover art for "To Hell with the Stars" by Gary Freeman

Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director **Gardner Dozois:** Editor
Sheila Williams: Managing Editor
Joel Davis: President & Publisher **William F. Battista:** Associate Publisher

Published 13 times a year by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.00 per copy ($2.50 per copy in Canada). Annual subscription of thirteen issues $19.50 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $24.20, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305. **If you have questions regarding your subscription call (614) 383-3141.** Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1987 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send form 3579 to IAsfm, Box 1933, Marion OH 43306. In Canada return to 625 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN 0162-2188.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

MEMORY

by Isaac Asimov

Every time I decide that I've gotten every kind of crazy letter it is possible to write, something new turns up. Last week, I received a lulu.

It's on nice gray paper that looks expensive. It has a corporation heading, nicely printed, with address and phone number. It is well-typed and looks just as though it were legitimate.

The writer describes himself as a physician, and as a specialist in "the treatment of age related disease."

He says in part: "During the past few months we have had communications on three seperate [sic] occasions. I have noticed that the quality of your correspondence has deteriorated significantly. . . . the increasing number of grammatical errors and even whole sentences which do not fit together or even make sense, has given me some concern."

He goes on to suggest that I consult "appropriate medical specialists."

As I read the letter, my eyebrows climbed upward. I was obviously being accused of being in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

I looked at the letter more closely. Although he describes himself as "a devoted fan," he misspells my first name. He lists my corporation as "Nightfall Enterprises" although that is not its name. Most of all, though, he speaks of three letters he received from me in the last few months, and I am quite certain I have never written to him at all. Besides which, when I do write I use a half-sheet of paper, wide margins and rarely type more than fifty strictly-business words. (Sorry, but I have virtually no time.) There is no room for "whole sentences which do not fit together or even make sense." One whole sentence is virtually all of the letter.

My conclusion, therefore, was that the letter was a gag from someone with a fake letterhead and a primitive sense of the macabre. For all I know identical letters have been received by Arthur C. Clarke and Robert A. Heinlein. I grinned and filed the letter in my folder labeled "Psychotic"—which is terribly full, by the way.

All such things have their uses. They stimulate thought— something I value beyond reckoning. To

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be sure, on this occasion, the thoughts they stimulated were uncomfortable, but even those are better than non-thought.

Suppose I *were* in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Would I know? I would have to judge a deteriorating brain *with* a deteriorating brain. Could I tell? What if my correspondence *was* deteriorating and I was too far gone to tell. What if I had written this individual three letters and was too far over-the-hill even to remember that I had. Is it possible?

And then I thought: No, it's not possible. In my own specific case, it is absolutely impossible, and here's why:

In the course of a year, I write and publish about 750,000 words. I've been doing this every year now for nearly thirty years. (Before that, I was only a part-time writer and may have written and published only 200,000 words a year.)

Most of what I write is closely-reasoned material. I do this tetraweekly editorial, a monthly science essay for *F & SF*, a semimonthly science essay for *American Way*, and a weekly science column for the *Los Angeles Times Syndicate*. I write many one-shot essays, and always have several non-fiction books in various stages of completion. Even my science fiction novels involve endless conversations full of close reasoning (concerning which a number of critics grow petulant, though my readers, being more intellectual than the critics, seem to love it.)

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
GARDNER DOZOIS:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Managing Editor
EMY ETERNO:
Editorial Assistant
RALPH RUBINO:
Corporate Art Director
TERRI CZECZKO:
Associate Art Director
RON KULINER:
Senior Designer
ANTHONY BARI:
Junior Designer
DENNIS DOYLE:
Junior Designer
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Manager
ROBERT J. ALLEN:
Production Assistant
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Director Subsidiary Rights
FLORENCE B. EICHIN:
Permissions & Contracts Manager
VEENA RAGHAVAN:
Public Relations
Promotions Manager
SONYA CASTELLUCCI:
Circulation Director Retail
Marketing
PAUL CHRISTIAN:
Circulation Planning Director
LAURA GUTH:
Circulation Director Subscriptions
RISA LUND:
Advertising Services Manager
ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

WILLIAM F. BATTISTA:
Publisher

JOEL DAVIS
President
FRED EDINGER
Senior Vice President
Finance
PAULA COLLINS
Senior Vice President
Circulation
CARL BARTEE
Vice President
Manufacturing
STEPHEN POLICOFF
Assistant Vice
President

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" on the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In short, if I were deteriorating at the rate my letter-writing "physician" would have it, that would show up with the force of a million-watt bulb in my writing, and approximately two dozen editors and two million readers would send me letters beginning, "What on Earth is going on with you, Dr. Asimov?" But they don't. And therefore my brain is doing well.

(Of course, two or three clever fellows may now proceed to write me a letter of this sort, suppressing their squeals and giggles.—Don't use pencil and block letters, kids. Get your mothers to type it for you.)

Having thought this through, I ended by relaxing for, to tell you the truth, I do worry about my memory.

Beautiful women, as they age, may study their mirrors anxiously, watching, with beating hearts, for those tell-tale crow's feet, and that frightening flabbiness here and there. Handsome men, as they age, may feel their hair for the beginning of a bald spot, and check the vertical nature of their abdominal profile. I do none of that. Neither my face nor my figure is my fortune; my memory is.

In my case, therefore, I get upset every time I can't think of the word I want.

Don't get me wrong. I don't have a photographic memory. I have particular trouble remembering names and faces and anything that doesn't interest me. I consider that good. Remembering such things would simply take up room in my brain that I need for what *does* interest me. (Louis Agassiz, who made his reputation on a five-volume tome on fossil fishes, never remembered the names of his students. When asked why that was, in view of his towering mentality, he answered, "I have noticed that every time I remember the name of a student, I forget the name of a fish.")

What I need for my writing, however, I remember. My dear wife, Janet, is quite unabashed at using me as a warm-blooded encyclopedia. She asks, and I answer, and she doesn't have to take the trouble to leaf through pages. And when I say (feeling the need for some small compliment): "Aren't you surprised I know the answer offhand," she says, "No, why should I be?"

People who interview me sometimes ask me about my corps of researchers and I have to tell them I don't have any. They ask me about the filing system in which I stack all my data, and tell me that they would love to see it because it must be the most complex system in the world considering all I write on all those subjects.

That just gets me embarrassed because it never occurred to me to set up a filing system and now it's too late to do so. I've always just stacked the stuff in my head and it's still there.

Mind you, the system isn't perfect. Things that used to interest me but interest me no longer have faded. When I was young, I used to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be able to remember a poem after reading it once, and be able to quote it, too. I can't do that any more. Even the poems I memorized as a youngster begin to suffer from missing lines.

But sometimes, they don't. I was at a fund-raising event in which a number of show business people did a little reciting for an appreciative audience. Richard Kiley undertook to recite "The Walrus and the Carpenter," the eighteen-verse poem from *Through the Looking Glass*. About the fourteenth verse, he got stuck and the more he tried, the blanker his mind got. (I know exactly how that works.) After about fifteen seconds of commiserative agony on my part, I shouted out, "I wish you were not quite so deaf," which was the line, of course, and he grinned and went on to the end. Whereupon the master of ceremonies said to Mr. Kiley afterward, "In case you wonder who your prompter was, it was Isaac Asimov." At that, Tony Randall (next in line) said, "I dare him to prompt me in this one."—No contest. I had never heard the item that he proceeded to recite, and I hoped earnestly he wouldn't get stuck. He didn't.

But my brain is now sixty-seven years old and I understand that there hasn't been a new brain cell added to the old pack since I was, at best, an infant, and perhaps since I was a fetus, and a lot of the brain cells that were there have gone. I can't help but realize that each year it will get worse and that someday—

But then I cheer myself up. First, let's not give up. Franklin Roosevelt once visited the retired Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. when he was in his nineties and in the hospital. The Justice put down the Greek grammar he was reading and the President said, "Why are you reading a Greek grammar, Mr. Holmes?" And Holmes replied, "To improve my mind, Mr. President."

Second, there seems to be a strong familial component to Alzheimer's disease, but no one in my family that I know of seems to have shown it. My father and mother both died in their seventies and, as it happened, I had occasion to speak to each on the day before they died, and they were both as sharp and keen as ever, though both were feeling physically ill at the time.

And, third, I can count on sweet Sheila to tell me when my editorials aren't up to par, to say nothing of the courtly and Chestertonian Gardner. ●

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 1933, Marion OH 43306.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Dozois, Dr. Asimov, Mr. Spinrad, & Company:

In the April 1987 Tenth Anniversary Issue of *IAsfm* I read with great interest Norman Spinrad's essay "On Books: Sturgeon, Vonnegut, and Trout." The essay was well done by Mr. Spinrad but I don't agree on all points.

Theodore Sturgeon was, in my opinion, a most determined individualist who was a master of the short story form. I don't feel that Mr. Sturgeon's output was governed by "—an almost career-long battle with writer's block." Rather, I feel Mr. Sturgeon avoided the SF concept of the *idea as the hero*, that he avoided the *gimmick story*, and so it took much longer for him to produce the stories he wished to see in print.

Now I am not trying to say Mr. Sturgeon's stories are not based on SF type concepts; they are, but he never pushed them over the line to turn them into *gimmick* stories.

To put it bluntly, Theodore Sturgeon gave a *damn*, and because of that, he produced a number of extraordinary stories—stories that made us *reach*, that made us *care*, and that made us *think*. Is that not what science fiction is all about?

If anyone questions the above, please read "The Skills of Xanadu" or "More Than Human" or "Some of Your Blood"—the answers are all there.

By the way, the above is but a point in what I thought was an otherwise interesting and thought-provoking essay by Mr. Spinrad. As for the rest of the Tenth Anniversary Issue, I thought it was grand. Could you please be so kind as to publish some more of Mr. Turtledove's stories?

Well, that's it. Take care and I'll remain

Sincerely yours,

Joseph E. May, Jr.
Hesperia, CA

I'm sorry, but we knew *Ted Sturgeon, and when we tell you that he suffered from writer's block, please take our word for it. There were times when he needed rent-money very badly, and any writer who was as skillful as Ted who could not write* something *to keep the wolf from the door is blocked.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. A:

Spinrad is disgustingly cutsiepoo in the April '87 issue, but does come up with an interesting bit of information. What became of Brian Kirby's "line of 'high quality stiffeners' "? Are they still working at the same stand? After all, if mod-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ern SF, written about people, was able to oust gadget-SF, maybe good sex stories can oust porn. Certainly censorship can't solve the problem.

Is "Rachel in Love" a good sex story? No: a good story, and about (among other things) sexual maturity and sexual relations, but no more a sex story than space-age mainstream is SF. Well, we hardly expect sex stories in an SF magazine, any more than we expect sports stories or westerns or any other category. We do expect occasional SF to involve sex or sports or the Old West, as well as cellular automata and the Oort Cloud and recombinant DNA.

Regarding the kind of criticism SF needs: All literature needs the sort of Old Criticism that Knight and Blish-as-Atheling provided, the way a caribou herd needs wolves: to weed out the sick and feeble. Also to give the strong some healthy exercise. Like reminding Turtledove that even if a previous story explained all that technological change within one preindustrial lifetime, presenting "Superwine" as an independent story means *independent*: standing on its own.

No literature needs the sort of New Criticism that uses the story to analyze the author. Like declaring Murphy a child-molester (because the hero of "Rachel in Love" mated with a male that she taught to "speak") or antifeminist (because she accepted the destiny of her anatomy) or whatever else a demented interpreter can come up with.

One good story to think about and one good read to enjoy at the time, out of five. Two interesting departments that don't spark com-

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU READ A TRULY BREATHTAKING HARD SF NOVEL?

READ

GREAT SKY RIVER

GREGORY BENFORD'S GREATEST NOVEL TO DATE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment and two that do (one of them otherwise junk) out of five. A good issue.

Sincerely,

Lee Burwasser
Hyattville, MD

Sex stories that are not pornography are by no means something new. There's one called "Romeo and Juliet." There's an opera called "Tristan and Isolde." We call them "love stories" to avoid the censor, but if you want a love story without sex you have to read about a boy and his dog.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have always believed that the mark of a good magazine is one in which the reader digests (no pun intended) everything from cover to cover, for pure enjoyment and a chance to react to each article on its own merit.

Your magazine does this well.

Like most people, when I react favorably, I tend to keep it to myself. When the reaction is unfavorable, I want to tell it to the world . . .

Point in case: the letter by Patrick MacDonald (Nov. 1986 issue).

Mr. MacDonald made a fascinating assumption in his plea to "patriotic SF writers." In answer to his question: "Yes, there are patriotic SF writers out there," and I have read several fine examples of their works. One or two were even American. Many were Canadian, British, French, and even Soviet.

The desire to "go through the galaxy, defending the American way" is disturbing. What if the American way were not attacked, but left alone with respect to its difference? (I have a suspicion that Mr. MacDonald's works are titled "Son of Rambo Meets the Bad Guys from Planet X.")

Diversity is the keystone to science fiction. (To steal from Mr. Spock: Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination.) I have always felt that one goal of SF is to put aside petty differences and patriotisms in favor of unification of the human race. Pride in our *planet* is healthier than patriotism directed at only one small portion of our globe. And jingoism is always dangerous . . .

As a hobby, I write SF. I am patriotic. I am also a Canadian. My stories are of the future, not free publicity for one existing government. Like many people, I am not satisfied with any particular country's handling of my planet, and dream of a future where we can overcome our problems to work together, combining the best of all. Without that belief, I'm very much afraid we won't make it to our own future!

Dr. Asimov, you have been patient. To compensate for my diatribe, let me assure you that your magazine is a major joy in my life, and you all deserve the highest accolades.

Publication of this letter isn't important—getting it off my chest is!!

Thank you.

Live long & prosper.

Karen L. Nicholson
Sydney, Nova Scotia
Canada

Dear Karen, I raise my glass to you. Thank you for getting it off

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your chest. I have often thought that the only true "Fatherland" is the planet Earth. Naturally, I am fond of American traditions and qualities and would like to see other nations adopt them, but I strongly suspect that other nations like some of their own traditions and qualities and I have no right to demand that those be abandoned.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Try to explain this one!

In the January 1987 issue of *IAsfm*, there is a letter from a Lelah L. Clemens (page 16). Ms. Clemens thinks that the author of Judith Tarr's "Piece de Resistance" is none other than yourself. You state otherwise, saying that if you think that *IAsfm* would publish an Asimov story under a name other than Asimov, you little know Joel Davis.

In the March '87 issue, on page 14, there is another letter from Ms. Clemens. Or rather, a Lelah L. Clemons (sic). As well as the name change, there are a few other differences between the two letters, but the basic text remains the same. Your answer to Ms. Clemens' (Clemons'?) second letter says that your name is your brand, and you stamp it on everything you write.

Just out of curiosity, how did that letter get printed twice? And which is it, Clemens or Clemons?

Yours,

Troy Jaffe
2145 Donald Dr.
Moraga, CA 94556

P.S. Great magazine!

EXPERIENCE
THE VERY
BEST
HARD SF
HAS TO OFFER.

EXPERIENCE

GREAT
SKY
RIVER

GREGORY
BENFORD'S
GREATEST NOVEL
TO DATE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You have made a great discovery. I am imperfect. What happened, apparently, was that I received two copies of the same letter, which were handed me at different times. Both struck me as interesting and I answered both (in different ways, of course) without recalling the first when I read the second. Sweet Sheila Williams then went through the same process independently and the same letter was printed twice.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Prof. Ike:

Allow me to start by saying that the current incarnation of *IAsfm* is far and away the most exciting SF mag of the last decade. Or maybe even longer. But bear in mind that I write letters to the editor about as often as you shave your sideburns, so yes, there are a number of things that bother me about your mag and prevent it from reaching the truly mindblowing proportions it has recently hinted at.

The most recent thing to bug me was the change in interior paper stock starting with the April '87 issue. It's horrible, feels like crap, and provides a much less clear resolution for the type. If I didn't know better, I'd almost say that you must have switched to using laser printing instead of real typesetting. I suppose your average reader is too busy worrying about what kind of a clown outfit to wear at the Con to worry about such matters, but I lie awake at night over this, and I bet one or two others do, too, so please do return to the old stock, and help keep me sane.

The fictional direction is damned impressive, but the departments are incredibly lacking. And I start with you, Mr. I. If Gardner is truly the editor of the mag, then give him full rein over the mag; surely he can better you in many ways other than pie-eating contests. Your editorials are unbearably insipid, and a lame throwback to the thankfully long obsolete Campbell era. Your cute obsession with insignificant trivialities is nothing but a waste of time (just think, you could spend that valuable time working on somthing serious like *Ike Asimov's Guide to Can Openers*, etc.). The fact that Mr. Dozois isn't even allowed to reply in the Letters column is another atrocity. Do you really think your name sells the magazine? I suppose it doesn't hurt in attracting the average housewife (in the most clichéd sense), but how many "average housewives" are you gonna attract while printing the likes of M. Swanwick's pretty amazing *Vacuum Flowers* (never mind stuff like Rucker's "Cellular Automata")? Etc. So please stop flogging your own name, and just let the magazine stand on its own. While you're at it, please bag the Gaming column (how can any serious mag allow such?), and send Baird Searles on a long vacation. He obviously has no idea of what's currently going on in the field, and I don't think any of your readers will cry at the prospect of losing his in-depth plot analysis of the latest Piers Anthony "masterpiece."

Thanks for your time, pal,

James F. Johnson III
Waltham, MA

My goodness, you react violently

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to a great many things. I am glad you recognize the precarious footing on which your sanity stands since a matter of a perceived change in paper stock is liable to drive you insane. If you're so depressed about various aspects of the magazine, think how badly you would feel if it weren't "the most exciting SF mag of the last decade." And our good editor, Gardner, can scarcely contain his delight over my agreeing to read and answer the letters, rather than he. Believe me, he has more challenging tasks to perform.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I do hate to nitpick, but in your April 1987 edition's Letters column you stated that "If I like x three times as much as y then I don't want only x. I want y, too—one-third of the time."

If your x to y ratio is 3:1 then would you not prefer y one-quarter of the time?

Yours sincerely,

Lawrence Lavitt
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada

P.S. Please bring back Martin Gardner's column.

A quarter of the time it is. There's such a thing as thinking too quickly and because I think so quickly I'm the world's worst chess player. I wish I could bring back Martin Gardner's column. I hope you don't think we fired him.

—Isaac Asimov

READ
GREAT SKY RIVER
AND REMEMBER WHY YOU FELL IN LOVE WITH HARD SF IN THE FIRST PLACE.
A BANTAM SPECTRA HARDCOVER
On sale this November
BANTAM SPECTRA
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GAMING

by Matthew J. Costello

I guess it's natural that, as a reviewer, I tend to become a bit jaded. With so many games arriving, with so much "sameness," the old excitement just isn't there.

But the good side of it is when something really special comes along. When I start playing a game that I find myself thinking about when I'm away in the real world, dealing with real-life problems like defunct transmissions and a negative checkbook balance, well, then I know we're cooking.

Firebird's Elite, a science fiction trading and combat simulation, was such a game. Remarkably difficult and sophisticated, *Elite* felt real. And now, also imported from the United Kingdom, comes *Firebird's The Sentry* (Firebird Inc., P.O. Box 49, Ramsey, NJ 07446). It too is decidedly special.

The game's theme is unusual—often a difficulty with new games—but the game play here more than makes up for any immediate disorientation.

You occupy a robot seeking to enter an alien landscape. Each landscape (there are over 10,000 different landscapes) is a strange grid of undulating peaks and valleys, with odd chasms and towers. The Sentry, an imposing figure that can scan the entire landscape, watches over the grid seeking for any sign of an intrusion.

To remain on the landscape you must move up to the Sentry— usually perched high in a tower—and absorb the Sentry's energy. But the game is not a simple move-and-shoot game. Movement is accomplished by creating another robot (by hitting "R" on the keyboard) to appear in a targeted square on the landscape. The selected square must be visible. You can't pick an unseen square to be the site for the new robot. Once a new robot is created, you can leave your current location (by pressing "Q") and transfer yourself into the new robot.

Energy is an important concept in the game. You start with a limited supply, to create things, and there is some opportunity to get added energy. You can absorb boulders (large cubes that sit on a square) and trees, adding to your energy level. Also, you can absorb your old robot or any boulder left behind after you move.

But the Sentry is also busy, changing any abandoned robots into boulders and the boulders into trees. As the Sentry turns it scans the landscape for any sign of movement . . . any sign of you. If it detects your motion, it begins to absorb your energy. If you can't move to a newly created robot, you must hit the "H" button—sending you off to hyper-space. This takes you to some randomly selected location on the landscape. If your en-

(continued on page 109)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Return to the wondrous city of Merovingen where mystery and intrigue await

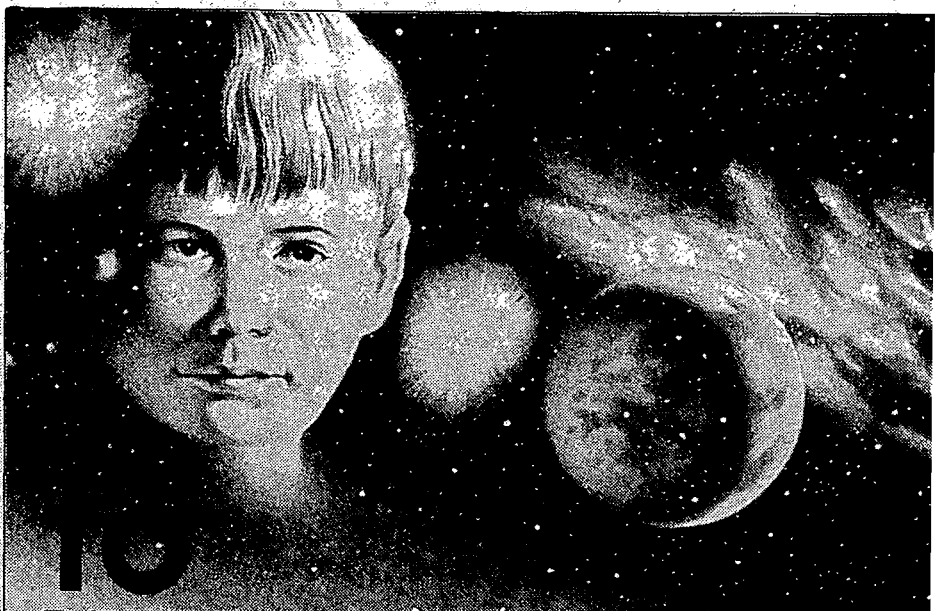
In ANGEL WITH THE SWORD, C.J. Cherryh introduced readers to Merovingen, a mysterious and exotic city of winding canals, where the rich dwell in high towers and beggars, thieves and spies lurk below. Cherryh then sought out master fantasy and science fiction authors to contribute stories to an intertwining Merovingen adventure. FESTIVAL MOON: MEROVINGEN NIGHTS #1 was the wonderful result.

Now, in FEVER SEASON: MEROVINGEN NIGHTS #2, she has once again assembled a series of closely linked tales by such top writers as Lynn Abbey and Janet and Chris Morris—as well as some of the finest new talents in the field. The Merovingen adventure continues...

$3.50 Distributed by NAL

DAW FANTASY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



TO HELL WITH THE STARS

"The author tells us that "'To Hell with the Stars' is a special story to me. Can't imagine what life would have been like without John Carter, all those magnificent first landings on other worlds, and the assorted comets, planets, and black holes which have, over the years, fallen into the solar system and careened hell-bent for Earth. This one, then, is an appreciation for the million or more of us who have enriched one another's lives by refusing to be tied to this time, to this place."

by Jack McDevitt
art: Bob Walters

Christmas night.

Will Cutler couldn't get the sentient ocean out of his mind. Or the creature who wanted only to serve man. Or the curious chess game in the portrait that hung in a deserted city on a world halfway across the galaxy. He drew up his knees, propped the book against them, and let his head sink back into the pillows. The sky was dark through the plexidome. It had been snowing most of the evening, but the clouds were beginning to scatter. Orion's belt had appeared, and the lovely double

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

star of Earth and Moon floated among the luminous branches of Granpop's elms. Soft laughter and conversation drifted up the stairs.

The sounds of the party seemed far away, and the *Space Beagle* rode a column of flame down into a silent desert. The glow from the reading lamp was bright on the inside of his eyelids. He broke the beam with his hand, and it dimmed and went out.

The book lay open at his fingertips.

It was hard to believe they were a thousand years old, these stories that were so full of energy and so unlike anything he'd come across before: tales of dark, alien places and gleaming temples under other stars and expeditions to black holes. They don't write like that anymore. Never had, during his lifetime. He'd read some other books from the classical Western period, some Dickens, some Updike, people like that. But these: what was there in the last thousand years to compare with this guy Bradbury?

The night air felt good. It smelled of pine needles and scorched wood and bayberry. And maybe of dinosaurs and rocket fuel.

His father might have been standing at the door for several minutes. "Goodnight, Champ," he whispered, lingering.

"I'm awake, Dad."

He approached the bed. "Lights out already?" he asked. "It's still early." His weight pressed down the mattress.

Will was slow to answer. "I know."

His father adjusted the sheet, pulling it up over the boy's shoulders. "It's supposed to get cold tonight," he said. "Heavy snow by morning." He picked up the book and, without looking at it, placed it atop the night table.

"Dad." The word stopped the subtle shift of weight that would precede the gentle pressure of his father's hand against his shoulder, the final act before withdrawal. "Why didn't we ever go to the stars?"

He was older than most of the other kids' dads. There had been a time when Will was ashamed of that. He couldn't play ball and he was a lousy hiker. The only time he'd tried to walk out over the Rise, they'd had to get help to bring him home. But he laughed a lot, and he always listened. Will was reaching an age at which he understood how much that counted for. "It costs a lot of money, Will. It's just more than we can manage. You'll be going to Earth in two years to finish school."

The boy stiffened. "Dad, I mean the *stars*. Alpha Centauri, Vega, the Phoenix Nebula—"

"The Phoenix Nebula? I don't think I know that one."

"It's in a story by a man named Clarke. A Jesuit goes there and discovers something terrible—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The father listened while Will outlined the tale in a few brief sentences. "I don't think," he said, "your mother would approve of your reading such things."

"She gave me the book," he said, smiling softly.

"This one?" It was bound in cassilate, a leather substitute, and its title appeared in silver script: *Great Tales of the Space Age*. He picked it up and looked at it with amusement. The names of the editors appeared on the spine: Asimov and Greenberg. "I don't think we realized, uh, that it was like that. Your mother noticed that it was one of the things they found in the time vault on the Moon a couple of years ago. She thought it would be educational."

"You'd enjoy it, Dad."

His father nodded and glanced at the volume. "What's the Space Age?"

"It's the name that people of the classical period used to refer to their own time. It has to do with the early exploration of the solar system, and the first manned flights. And, I think, the idea that we were going to the stars."

A set of lights moved slowly through the sky. "Oh," his father said. "Well, people have had a lot of strange ideas. History is full of dead gods and formulas to make gold and notions that the world was about to end." He picked up the book, adjusted the lamp, and opened to the contents page. His gray eyes ran down the listings, and a faint smile played about his lips. "The truth of it, Will, is that the stars are a pleasant dream, but no one's ever going out to them."

"Why not?" Will was puzzled at the sound of irritation in his own voice. He was happy to see that his father appeared not to have noticed.

"They're too *far*. They're just too far." He looked up through the plexidome at the splinters of light. "These people, Greenberg and Asimov: they lived, what, a thousand years ago?"

"Twentieth, twenty-first century. Somewhere in there."

"You know that new ship they're using in the outer System? The *Explorer*?"

"Fusion engines," said the boy.

"Yes. Do you know what its top recorded speed is?"

"About a hundred fifty thousand miles an hour."

"Much faster than anything this Greenberg ever saw. Anyhow, if they'd launched an *Explorer* to Alpha Centauri at the time these stories were written, at that speed, do you know how much of the distance they would have covered by now?"

Will had no idea. He would have thought they'd have arrived long ago, but he could see that wasn't going to be the answer. His father produced a minicomp, pushed a few buttons, and smiled. "About five percent. The *Explorer* would need another eighteen-thousand years to get there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ECLIPSE

John Shirley

One of the most powerful storytellers in a new generation forges a brilliant punk saga of the too real future.

"Powerful imagery...hard to put down." —*Washington Post*

"Vivid, dense, full of detail, passion and acute characterizations." —*Science Fiction Review*

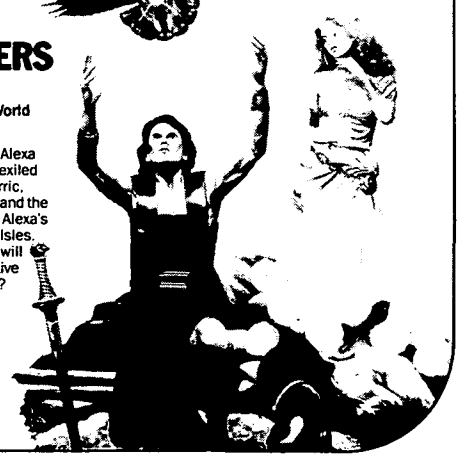
The Soviets invade. NATO retaliates with a devastating nuclear attack on the borders of Western Europe. Governments collapse, and the terror of fascism rises again.

Against this totalitarian regime, stands only a rag-tag band of freedom fighters known as the New Resistance. One of them is Rickenharp, a burned-out rock musician who will play the song of his life to summon the ghost of liberty and end the dark rule that has created a man-made Eclipse.

Cover art by Joe DeVito
0-445-20506-7/$3.50
(In Canada: 0-445-20507-5/$4.50

Questar

Science Fiction/Science Fantasy



THE WOMAN OF FLOWERS

Susan Shwartz

A visionary tale of druids, magic and might from World Fantasy nominee Susan Shwartz.

Once a princess of Byzantium, beautiful, sphinx-like Alexa is now a fugitive accused of murder and treachery—exiled from her own beloved kingdom. Her only brother, Marric, once Byzantium's powerful ruler, is locked in slavery and the empire threatened by evil forces and barbaric tribes. Alexa's only hope lies among the Druids of the distant Misty Isles. They alone can teach her to use her powers well. But will they be powers strong enough to let her free her captive brother and reclaim the ancient heritage that is hers?

Cover art by Rowena Morrill
0-445-20358-7/$3.50
(In Canada: 0-445-20359-5/$4.50)

POPULAR LIBRARY

AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE

© Popular Library 1987

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Long ride," said Will grudgingly.

"You'd want to take a good book."

The boy was silent.

"It's not as if we haven't tried, Will. There's an artificial world, half-built, out beyond Mars someplace. They were going to send out a complete colony, people, farm animals, lakes, forest, everything."

"What happened?"

"It's too *far*. Hell, Will, life is good here. People are happy. There's plenty of real estate in the solar system if folks want to move. In the end, there weren't enough volunteers for the world-ship. I mean, what's the *point*? The people who go would be depriving their kids of any kind of normal life. How would *you* feel about living inside a tube for a lifetime? No beaches. Not real ones anyhow. No sunlight. No new places to explore. And for what? The payoff is so far down the road that, in reality, there *is* no payoff."

"In the stories," Will said, "the ships are very fast."

"I'm sure. But even if you traveled on a light beam, the stars are very far apart. And a ship can't achieve an appreciable fraction of that kind of velocity because it isn't traveling through a vacuum. At, say, a tenth of the speed of light, even a few atoms straying in front of it would blow the damned thing apart."

Outside, the Christmas lights were blue on the snow. "They'd have been disappointed," the boy said, "at how things came out."

"Who would have?"

"Benford. Robinson. Sheffield."

The father looked again at the table of contents. "Oh," he said. He riffled idly through the pages. "Maybe not. It's hard to tell, of course, with people you don't know. But we've eliminated war, population problems, ecological crises, boundary disputes, racial strife. Everybody eats pretty well now, and for the only time in its history, the human race stands united. I suspect if someone had been able to corner, say—," he paused and flipped some pages, "—Jack Vance, and ask him whether he would have settled for this kind of world, he'd have been delighted. Any sensible man would. He'd have said *to hell with the stars!*"

"No!" The boy's eyes blazed. "He *wouldn't* have been satisfied. None of them would."

"Well, I don't suppose it matters. Physical law is what it is, and it doesn't much matter whether we approve or not. Will, if these ideas hadn't become dated, and absurd, this kind of book wouldn't have disappeared. I mean, we wouldn't even know about *Great Tales of the Space Age* if someone hadn't dropped a copy of the thing into the time capsule. That should tell you something." He got up. "Gotta go, kid. Can't ignore the guests."

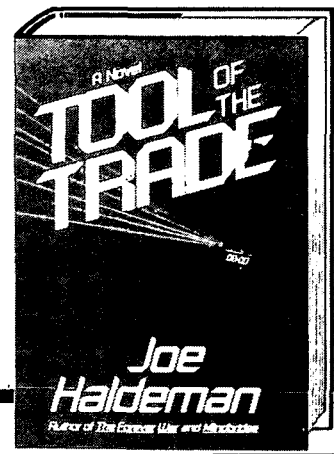
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If there was a Fort Knox for science fiction writers who really matter, we'd have to lock Haldeman up there."
—Stephen King

A middle-aged MIT professor (and KGB sleeper agent) finds his quiet life—and perhaps the world's future—irrevocably shattered after he stumbles onto a device capable of becoming the most awesome weapon in history.

The new novel by the Nebula and Hugo Award-winning author of The Forever War and Mindbridge

William Morrow



"But," said the boy, "You can't really be *sure* of that. Maybe the time was never right before. Maybe they ran out of money. Maybe it takes all of us working together to do it." He slid back into the pillows. His father held up his hands, palms out, in the old gesture of surrender he always used when a game had gone against him. "We could do that *now*, Dad," Will continued. "There's a way to build a *Space Beagle. Somehow.*"

"Let me know if you figure it out, son." The lights died, and the door opened. "You'll have to do it yourself, though. Nobody *else* is giving it any thought. Nobody has for centuries."

The snow did not come. And while Will Cutler stared through the plexidome at the slowly awakening stars, thousands of others were also discovering Willis and Swanwick and Tiptree and Sturgeon. They lived in a dozen cities across Will's native Venus. And they played on the cool green hills of Earth and farmed the rich Martian lowlands; they clung to remote shelters among the asteroids, and watched the skies from silver towers beneath the great crystal hemispheres of Io and Titan and Miranda.

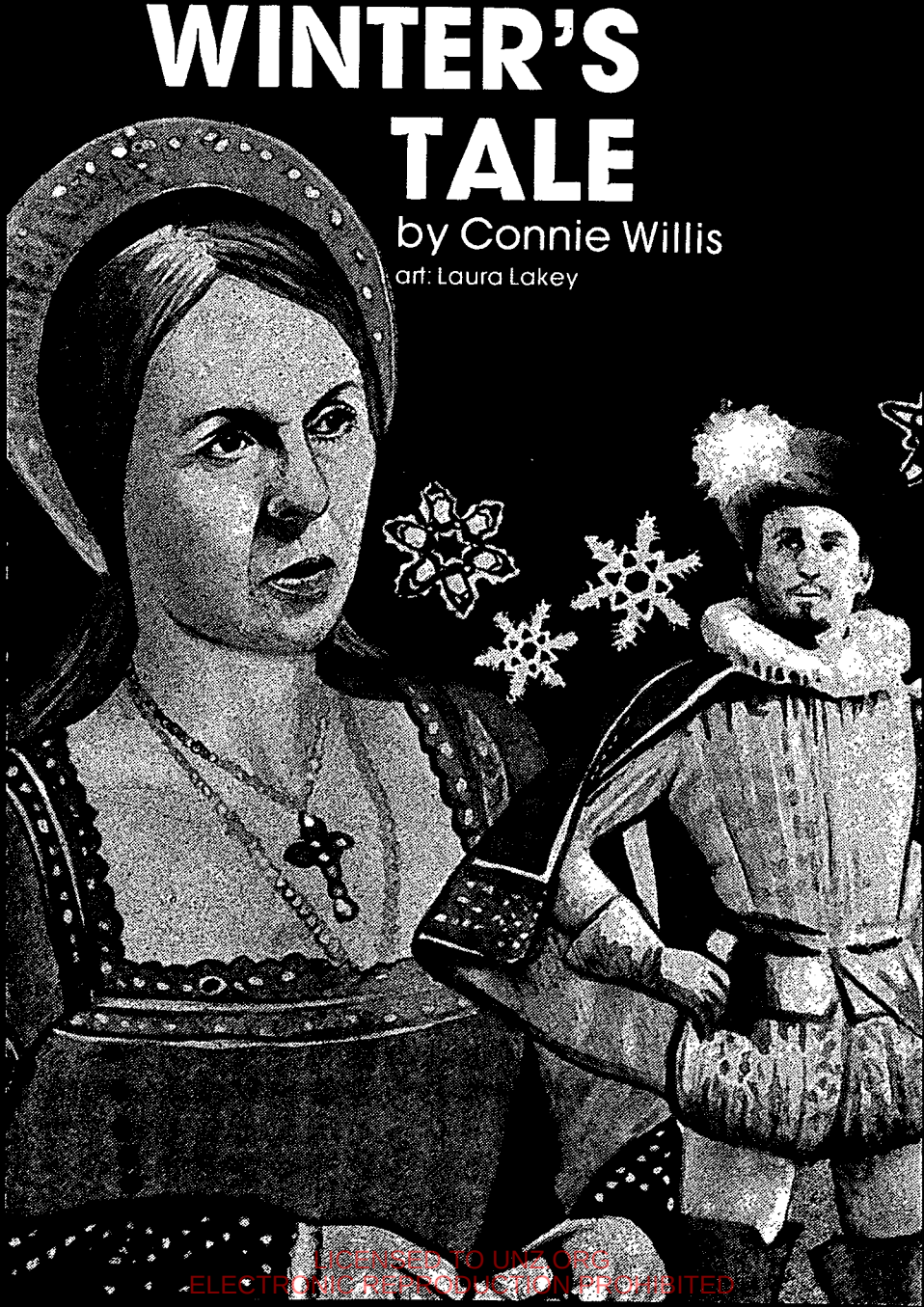
The ancient summons flickered across the worlds, insubstantial, seductive, irresistible. The old dreamers were bound, once again, for the stars. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINTER'S TALE

by Connie Willis

art: Laura Lakey



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In our second seasonal story, Connie Willis mixes what is real and what is only an appearance in a story which may, or may not be, about reality as we know it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is the will here?" he said. "I need . . ."

"Thou hast no need of wills," I said, putting my hand upon his poor hot brow. "You have but a fever, husband. You should not have stayed so late last eve with Master Drayton."

"A fever?" he said. "Aye, it must be so. It was raining when I rode home, and now my head is like to split in twain."

"I have sent to John for medicine. It will be here soon."

"John?" he said, alarmed, half-rising in the bed. "I had forgot Old John. I must needs bequeath the old man something. When he came to London—"

"I spoke of John Hall, thy son-in-law," I said. "He will bring you somewhat for thy fever."

"I must leave Old John something in my will, that he'll keep silence."

"Old John will not betray you," I said. He hath been silent, lo, these twelve winters, buried in Trinity Church, no danger to anyone. "Hush, thee, and rest awhile."

"I would leave him something of gaud and glitter. The gilt and silver bowl I sent thee from London. Do you remember it?"

"Yea, I remember it," I said.

The bowl had come at midday as I was making the second-best bed. I had already made the best bed for the guests, if any came with him, airing the hangings and putting on a new featherbed, and was going into my room to see to the second-best bed when my daughter Judith called up the stairs that a rider had come. I thought that it was he, and left the bed unturned and forgot. Ere I remembered it, it was late afternoon, all the preparations made and we in our new clothes.

"I should have stuffed a new feather bed," I said, laying the coverlid upon the press. "This one is flattened out and full of dust."

"You will spoil your new gown, Mother," Judith said, standing well away. "What matters if the bed be turned? He'll notice not the beds, so glad he'll be to see his family."

"Will he be glad?" Susanna said. "He waited long enough for this homecoming, if it be that. What does he want, I wonder." She took the sheets and folded them. Elizabeth climbed onto the bed to fetch a pillow and brought it me, though it was twice her size.

"To see his daughters, perhaps, or his granddaughter, and make his peace with all of us," Judith said. She took the pillow from Elizabeth gingerly and brushed her skirts when she had laid it down. "It will be dark soon."

" 'Tis light enough for us to make a bed," I said, reaching my hands to lift it up. "Come help me turn the featherbed, daughters." Susanna took one side, Judith the other, all unwillingly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'll turn it," Elizabeth said, squeezing herself next the wall at the foot, all eagerness to help and like to have her little fingers crushed.

"Wilt thou go out and see if they are coming, granddaughter?" I said. Elizabeth clambered over the bed, kirtle and long hair flying.

"Put on thy cloak, Bess," Susanna cried after her.

"Aye, Mother."

"This room was ever dark," Judith said. "I know not why you took it for your own, Mother. The window is high and small, and the narrow door shuts out the light. Father may be ill-pleased at such a narrow bed."

It were well if he were, I thought. It were well if he found it dark and cramped and would sleep elsewhere. "Now," I said, and we three heaved the featherbed up and over the foot of the bedstead. Dust and feathers flew about, filling the room.

"Oh, look at my doublet," Judith said, brushing at the ruffles on her bosom. "Now we shall have to sweep again. Can you not get the serving boy to do this?"

"He is laying the fires," I said, pulling at the underside.

"Well, the cook then."

"She is cooking. Come, one more turn and we'll be done with it."

"Dost thou hear something?" she said, shaking out her skirts. She went out. "Have they come, Bess?" she called.

I waited, listening for the sound of horses' hooves, but I heard naught.

Susanna stood still at the side of the bed, holding the linen sheet. "What think thee of this visitation, Mother? Thou hast said naught of it since word arrived of his coming."

What could I answer her? That I feared this day as I had feared no other? The day the message had come, I'd taken it from Susanna's hand and tried to draw its meaning out, though she had read it out already and I had never learnt to read. "To my wife," it had read. "I will arrive in Stratford on the twelfth day of December." I had kept the message by me from that day to this, trying to see the meaning of it, but I could not cipher its meaning. To my wife, I will arrive in Stratford on the twelfth day of December. To my wife.

"I have had much to do," I said. I gave the featherbed a mighty pull and brought it flat across the bed. "New rushes to be laid within the hall, the baking to be done, the beds to make."

"He came not to his parents' funeral, nor Hamnet's, nor to my wedding. Why comes he now?"

I smoothed the featherbed, pressing the corners so that they lay neat and smooth.

"If the house be too full of guests, you can come to us at the croft, Mother," Susanna said. She folded out the sheet and held it to me. "Or if he . . . you ever have a home with us."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" 'Twas but a passing townsman," Judith said, coming back into the room. "Think you he will bring friends with him from London?"

"His message said he would arrive today," Susanna said, and bellied out the sheet, sweet with lavender, over the bed. "Naught else. Who should accompany him or why he comes or whether he will stay."

"Come, he will stay," Judith said, coming to fold the sheet against the side. "I hope his friends are young and handsome."

There was a creak upon the stairs. We stopped, stooped over the bed.

"Bess?" Susanna inquired.

"Nay, my little grandniece stands outside all uncovered," Joan said and came, creaking, into the room. She wore a yellow ruff so high it seem'd to throttle her. It was the ruff that creak'd, or mayhap her leather farthingale. "I told her she will catch the sweating fever. I bade her put her on a heavier cloak, but she heeded me not."

"Hath it begun to snow, sister-in-law?" I said.

"Nay, but it looks to ere long." She sat upon the bed. "Are you not dressed, and my brother nearly here?" She spread her overskirts on either side that we might see her satin petticoat. "You look a common country wife."

"I am a common country wife," I said. "Good sister, we must make the bed."

She stood up, the ruff creaking as if it were a signboard on a tavern. "A cold welcome for your husband," she said, "the beds unmade, the children unattended, and you in rough, low broadcloth." She sat down on the coverlid on the press. "A winter's welcome."

I stuffed the pillows into their cases with something force. "Where is your husband, madam?" I said, and putting the pillows to the bed, boxed them a blow or two to make them plump.

"Home with the ague," she said, turning to look at Susanna, her ruff making a fearsome sound. "And where is yours?"

"Attending to a patient in Shottery," Susanna said, still sweetly. "He will be here anon."

"Why wear you that unbecoming blue, Susanna?" Joan said. "And Judith, your collar is so small it scarcely shows."

"At least 'tis silent," Judith said.

"He will not know you, Judith, so sharp-tongued have you become. You were a sweet babe when he left. He'll know not you either, Good Sister Anne, so pale and old you look. He'll not look so, I wot. But then, he's not so old as you."

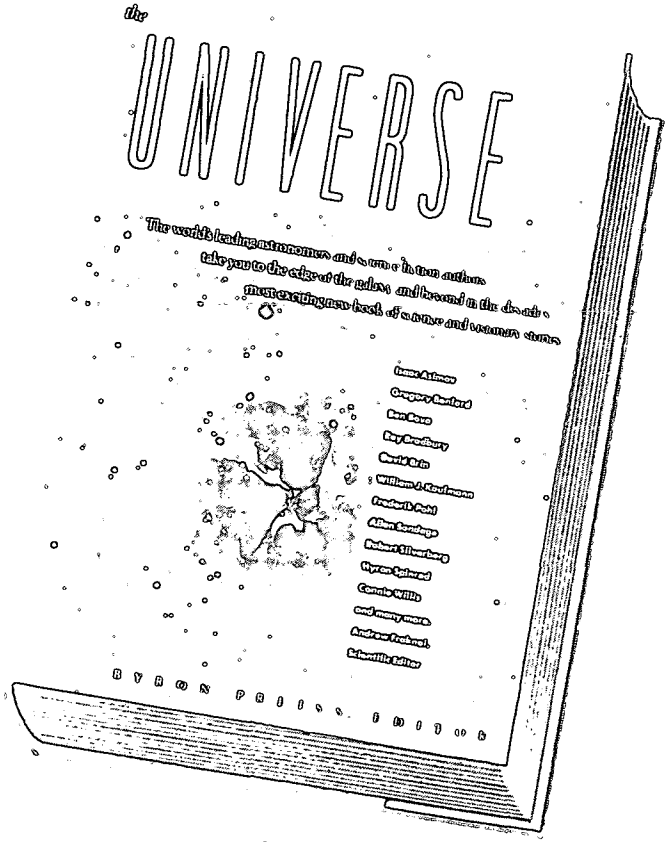
"No, nor so busy," I said. I took the quilt from off the bed-rail and laid it on the bed.

"I remember me when he was gone to London, Anne. You said you would not e'er see him again. What say you now?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TAKE THE ULTIMATE JOURNEY

Breathtaking fiction from some of sf's best...
Mind-boggling essays from expert astronomers...
Over 40 full-color paintings and deep-space photographs...



A tour of the universe has never been this wondrous before.

From the creators of THE PLANETS
A selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.
A BANTAM SPECTRA HARDCOVER

BANTAM SPECTRA
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He is not here, and dusk is fast upon us," Susanna said. "I say he will not come."

"I wonder what my brother will think of the impertinent daughters he hath raised," Joan said.

"He raised us not," Susanna said hotly, and on the same breath Judith cried out, "At least we do not trick ourselves out like—"

"Let us not quarrel," I said, putting myself between them and their aunt. "We all are tired and vexed with worry that it is so late. Good Sister Joan, I had forgot to tell you. A gift hath come from him this very day. A gilt and silver bowl. 'Tis on the table in the hall."

"Gilt?" Joan said.

"Aye, and silver. A broad bowl for the punch. I will with thee to see it."

"Let us go down then," she said, rising from the chest with a great sound, like a gallows in a wind. I picked the coverlid up.

"They've come!" Elizabeth shouted. She burst into the room, the hood of her cloak flung back from her hair and her cheeks as red as apples. "Four of them! On horses!"

Joan pressed her hands to her bosom momently, then adjusted her ruff. "What does he look like, Bess?" she asked the little girl. "Doth he be very changed?"

Elizabeth gave her an impatient glance. "I never saw him ere this. I know not even which one he is."

"Four of them?" Judith said. "Be the others young?"

"I told thee," Elizabeth said, stamping her little foot. "I know not which is which." She tugged at her mother's sleeve. "Come!"

Susanna plucked a feather from my cap. "Mother . . . ?" she said.

I stood, the coverlid still held against me like a shield. "The bed's not yet made," I said.

"Marry, I'll not leave my brother ungreeted," Joan said. She gathered her skirts. "I'll go down alone."

"No!" I said. I lay the coverlid over the end of the bedstead. "We must all go together." I seized Elizabeth's hand and let her run me down the stairs ahead of them, that Joan might not reach the door before me.

"Now I remember me," he said. "I left the bowl to Judith. What was bequeath'd to Joan?"

"Thy clothes," I said smilingly. "You said 'twould keep her silent as she walked."

"Ay, she is possessed of strange and several noises of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains . . . ." He took my hand. His own was dry and rough as his night smock, and hot as fire. "Silent. She must keep silent. I should have left her something more."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The will bequeaths her twenty pounds a year and the house on Henley Street. You have no need of purchasing her silence. She knows naught."

"Aye, but what if she, seeing my cold corpse, should on a sudden realize?"

"What talk is this of corpses?" I said, pulling my hand vexatiously away. I pulled the sheet to cover him. "You had too merry a meeting with thy friends, and now a little fever. You'll soon be well again."

"I was sick when I came," he said. "How long ago it seems. Three years. I was sick, but you made me well again. I am so cold. Is't winter?"

I wished for John to come. " 'Tis April. It is the fever makes thee cold."

" 'Twas winter when I came, do you remember? A cold day."

"Aye, a cold day."

He had sat still on his horse. The others had dismounted, the oldest and broadest of them doubled, his hands to his knees, as though to catch his breath, the younger ones rubbing their hands against the cold. A white dog ran about their legs, foolishly barking. The young men had sharp beards and sharper faces, though their clothes bespoke them gentlemen. The one who was the master of the dog, if he could be called so, had on a collar twice wider than Joan's, the other a brown cap with russet feathers stolen from a barnyard cock.

"I should not have plucked the feather from your cap, Mother," Susanna whispered. "It is the fashion."

"Oh, look," Joan said, squeezing through the door. "He has not changed a bit!"

"Which one is my grandfather?" Elizabeth said, her little hand clasped to mine.

They turned to look at us, the feather'd one with a face canny as a fox's, the collared one with a gawking gaze. The bent man stood with a groan that made the dog run at him. His doublet was quilted and puffed as to make him look twice as broad as his own girth. "Come, come, Will," he said, turning to look at him still on his horse, "we've come to the wrong house. These ladies are too young and fair to be thy family."

Joan laughed, a screeching sound like the cackle of a hen.

"Is he the one on the horse?" Elizabeth said, squeezing my numbed hand and jumping up and down.

"You did not tell me that he was so well-favored, Mother," Judith said in my ear.

He handed down a metal chest behind him. The round man gave it to the feather'd one and put a hand up to help him dismount. He came down off the horse oddly, grasping the quilted shoulder with one hand, the horse's neck with the other and heaving himself over and down on his left leg. He stepped forward, stiff-gaited, watching us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"See how he limps!" Joan cried.

I could not feel the wind, e'en though it bellied his short cloak and Elizabeth's hair. "Which one is my grandfather?" she said, fairly dancing in her impatience.

I would have made her answer, but I could not speak nor move. I only stood, quiet as a statue, and looked at him. He looked older even than I, the hair half-gone on the crown of his head. I had not thought him to look so old. His face was seamed with lines that gave it a sadness of demeanor, as if he had endured a many Novembers' blasts. A winter's face, sad and tired but not unkind, and that I had not thought it to be either.

The round-bellied gentleman turned to us and smiled. "Come, ladies, well met," he said with a merry, booming voice that conquered the wind. "I was long upon the road from London and thought not to find such fair ladies at the end of it. My name is Michael Drayton. And these two gentlemen are Gadshill," he pointed at the the one with the ruff, then at the fox, "and Bardolph. Two actors they, and I a poet and lover of fair ladies." His voice and manner were merry, but he looked troubledly from Joan to me and back again. "Come, tell me your names and which of you his wife and which his daughters, that I speak not amiss."

"Come, Mother, speak and bid them welcome," Judith whispered, and nudged at my elbow, but still I could not speak nor move nor breathe.

He moved not either, though Master Drayton looked at him. I could not read his face. Was he dismayed, or vexed, or only weary?

"If you'll not greet him, I shall," Joan whispered, bending her head to me with a snapping sound. She stretched her arms toward them. "Welcome—"

I stepped down off the porch. "Husband, I bid thee welcome," I said, and kissed him on his lined cheek. "I could not speak at first, my husband, so struck was I to see thee after such an absence." I took his arm and turned to Master Drayton. "I bid thee welcome, too, and thee, and thee," I said, nodding to the young men. The ruffed one wore now a silly grin, though the one with the feathers looked foxy still. " 'Tis a poor country welcome we have to give, but we've warm fires and hot supper and soft beds."

"Aye, and pretty maids," Drayton said. He took my hand and kissed it in the French fashion. "I think that I will stay the winter long."

I smiled at him. "Come then, we'll out of the cold," I said.

"How looks he, Mother," Susanna whispered to me as I passed. "Find you him very changed?"

"Aye, very changed," I said.

"I have bequeathed naught to Drayton," he said. "I should have done."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FINALLY IN PAPERBACK–
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER!

THE MIRROR OF HER DREAMS

Mordant's Need

Stephen R. Donaldson

Terisa Morgan had been preparing to spend another evening alone when, without warning, a man appeared in her mirror. Not as a reflection – he was *in* the mirror. He told her a story of a kingdom called Mordant... that needed *her* help to avoid destruction...

"AN IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE!"
– New York Times Book Review

"INTRICATE, MADCAP, INVOLVING."
– Washington Post Book World

DEL REY
On Sale in November $4.95
#1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There is no need," I said, laying a cool cloth on his brow. "He is thy friend."

"I would have left him some token of my friendship. And thee some token of my love. You know why I could not bequeath the property to you." He took hold of my hand with his own burning one. "If it were found out after my death, I would not have men say I bought your silence."

"I have my widow's portion, and Susanna and John will care for me," I said, loosing his hand to dip the cloth in the bowl again and wring it. "She is a good daughter."

"Aye, a good daughter, though she loved me not at first. Nor did thee."

"That is not true," I said.

"Come, Mistress Anne, when did you love me?" he said. I laid the cloth across his brow. He closed his eyes, and sighed, and seemed to sleep.

"The very instant that I saw you," I said.

We made a slow progress into the house, he leaning on me as we stepp'd over the threshold and into the hall. "My leg grows stiff when I have ridden awhile," he said. "I need but to stand by the fire a little."

Joan crowded close behind, her farthingale filling the door so that the others could not follow till she was through. Master Drayton followed upon her skirts, telling Judith and Susanna in a loud and merry voice of what had passed upon the road from London. "As we came across the bridge, four rogues in buckram thrust at me." Drayton gestured bravely. Elizabeth stared at him, her eyes round.

The young men, Fox and Frill, entered the hall, bearing bags and the metal chest. They stopped inside the door to hear the tale that Drayton told. Frill dropped his sacks with a thump upon the floor. The Fox set the casket beside it.

"These four began to give me ground, but I followed me close."

"Husband," I said under cover of his windy voice, "thou must needs compliment thy sister Joan Hart on her new ruff. She is most proud of it." He gazed at me, and still I could not decipher his look. "Thy daughters, too, have new finery for this occasion. Susanna hath a blue—"

"Surely a man knows his own daughters," Joan said ere I could finish speaking, "though he hath not had a chance to greet them. Thy wife would keep thee all to herself."

"Good Sister Joan," he said. He bowed to her. "I would have greeted thee outside, but I knew thee not."

Joan said, "Thou did'st not know me?" Her voice was sharp, and I looked anxiously at her, but could see naught in her face but peevishness. The Fox turned to look, too.

"I knew you not for that you seem'd so young."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Liar," the Fox said, turning back round to Drayton. "Those four were not knaves at all, but beggars. They asked for alms."

"Ah, but it makes a good tale," Drayton said.

"I knew you not. The years have been far kinder to you than to me, Sister," he said.

" 'Tis not true," Joan said, tossing her head. Her ruff groaned. "You look the same as on that day you left for London. Thy wife said on that day she'd not see her husband again. What say you now, Anne?" She smiled with spite at me.

"Thy gown is a most rare fashion, Sister," he said.

"Is't?" she said, spreading her skirts with her hands. "I thought it meet to dress in the fashion for your homecoming, brother." She gazed at my plain gown. "Though thy wife did not. Girls!" she called in a shrill voice that overmastered Drayton's. "Come meet thy father."

I had not had the opportunity to speak and say, "Susanna hath a blue stomacher." They came forward, Bess holding to Judith's hand, and I saw with dismay that Judith's frontlet skirt was blue also.

"Husband," I said, but he had stepped forward already, limping a little. Joan folded her hands across her doublet, waiting to see what he would say.

Judith stepped forward, holding Elizabeth's hand. "I am thy daughter Judith, and this Susanna's little daughter Bess."

"And this must be Susanna," he said. She nodded sharply. He stooped to take Bess's hand. "Is thy true name Elizabeth?"

Bess looked up at him. "Who are you?"

"Thy grandsire," Judith said, laughing. "Did you not know it yet?"

"She could not know her grandfather," Susanna said. "She was not born and I a child her age when you left us. Why have you come after all these years away, Father?"

"Susanna!" Joan said.

"I knew not how you looked, if you were fair," he answered quietly, "if you were well and happy. I came to see if there was aught that I could do for you."

"There's somewhat you can do for me, Will," Drayton said, clapping a hand to his shoulder. "Give me a cup of sack, man. I am half-froze and weary and was set upon by thieves. And hungry, too."

"I'll fetch it," Judith said, smiling at the Frill. " 'Tis in the kitchen, already warmed and mixed with sugar."

"I'll help thee," the Frill said.

The Fox said, "Madam, where shall I put these bags and boxes?"

"In the bedchambers," I said. "Husband, where would you have your chest?"

"Leave it," he said. "I'll bear it there myself."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Judith brought in the sack in a ewer with a cloth round it and poured it, steaming, into the bowl.

"I smell sweet savors," Drayton said, holding his cup out to her. "What's in it?"

"Cinnamon," Judith said, smiling the while at the Frill. "And sugar. And divers spices. Father, wilt thou drink a cup?"

He smiled sweetly at her. "I would put this in a safe place first." He raised the chest and turned to me. "Good wife, where would you have me sleep?"

"What's in the chest?" Elizabeth said.

"Infinite riches," Drayton said, and drained his cup.

I led the way up the stairs to my bedchamber, he following behind, dragging his leg a little under the weight of the chest.

"Where would you have me put it, Wife?" he asked when we came into the room. "In the corner?" He set the chest down and leant against the wall, his hand upon his leg. "I am too old for such burdens."

I stood against the door. He stood and looked at me, the lines in his unfamiliar face cut deep and sad.

"Where is my husband?" I said.

"Where is the will?" he said.

I had thought he slept and had stepped quietly to the door to see if John were come. "You must stop this talk of wills and assay to sleep," I said, folding the sheets under the featherbed that he might not cast them off. The featherbed made a rustling sound.

He started up, then lay back down again. "I thought I had heard Joan."

"Fear not," I said. "She'll not come. She is in mourning."

He looked as though he knew not what I spoke of. I said, "Her husband died these ten days since."

"Of the ague? Or overmuch noise?" he said and smiled at me, and then his face grew sad, the lines deep-carved upon it. "She knew me not."

"Nay, and 'twere well she did not."

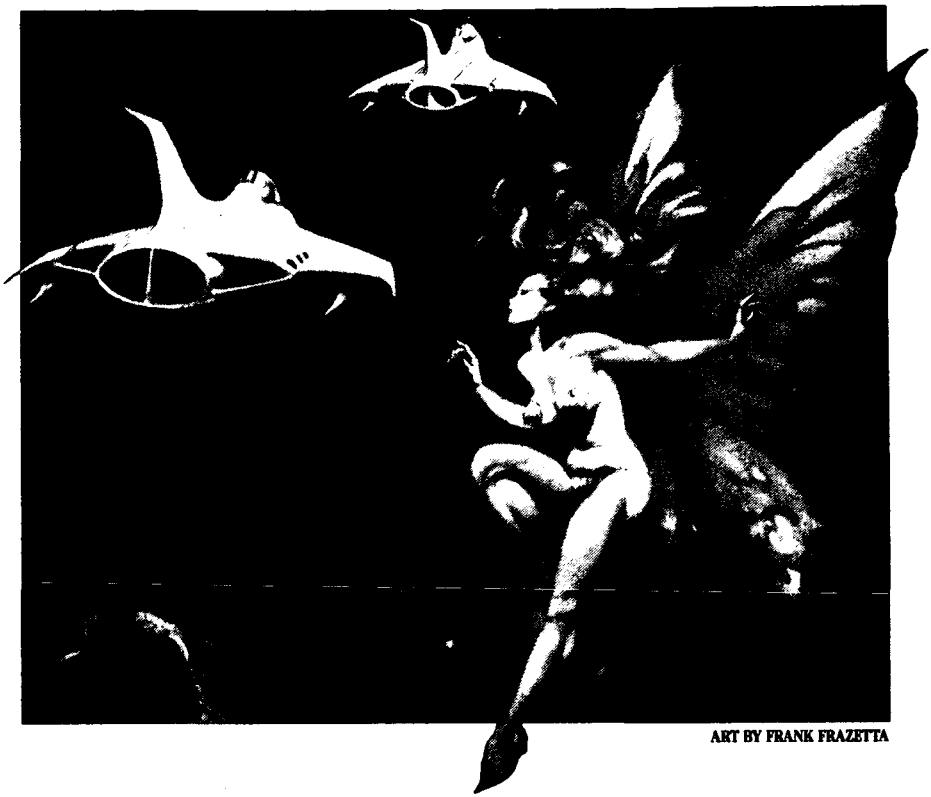
"Aye, well," he said. "When they first came to me, I thought not it would succeed. A one would say, I know him by his voice, or by his wit, or by his gait. But none said it. All believed, till at last so did I, and came to think I had a wife and daughters."

"And so thou hast," I said.

"Where is my husband?" I had asked, and he had not answered me at first, but let out his breath sighingly, as if he were relieved. "I knew not that I had a wife and children till his father came to London to tell me that the boy had died," he said.

"What have you done with him?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ART BY FRANK FRAZETTA

L. RON HUBBARD *presents* WRITERS *of The* FUTURE

VOLUME III

Soar into the unique and different worlds of SF's freshest, newest creators! Discovered by the acclaimed international Writers of The Future talent search, these are the startling, provocative vanguard of the award-winning next wave of science fiction and fantasy new ideas!

"...One of the best collections of new science fiction I've ever seen!" said **Arthur C. Clarke** on Writers of The Future.

Scores of other major SF figures and commentators have echoed his opinion. Now delve into the latest and best of this widely-praised series!

Monsters and starships, time-travellers and aliens, robots and rebels...all abound in these pages. Plus practical how-to advice on writing by Gregory Benford, Frederik Pohl, Jerry Pournelle...and a major statement on art and communication by best-selling master L. Ron Hubbard himself!

"The best of the fresh talent..."

—GENE WOLFE

"The best, the very best..."

—MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

14 all-new stories! Essays and contest information! And a stunning new Frank Frazetta wraparound cover painting! Buy your copy today! $4.50 wherever fine books are sold!

Copyright © 1537 Bridge Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He sat down heavily upon the bed. "I cannot long stand on my bad leg," he said. "I killed him."

"When?"

"Near twenty years ago."

These twenty years since, he had lain in his grave. "How came you to kill him? Was it in a fight?"

"Nay, madam." He rubbed his leg. "He was murdered."

He answered me as plainly as I asked, more plainly, for my voice was so light and airy I thought not it would carry the width of the room.

"How came he to be murdered?" I said.

"He had the misfortune to somewhat resemble me in countenance," he said.

I sat down on the coverlid-drap'd press. Dead. I had never thought him dead.

"I fell into some trouble with the queen," he said at last. "I had . . . done her a service now and then. It made me overbold. Thinking myself safe from the fire, I spoke in jest of things that had got other men burnt, and was arrested. I fled to friends, asking their help to transport me to France. They told me to lie secretly in London at a certain house until they had arranged passage for me, but when they came, they said that it was all accomplished. The man was dead, and I was free to take his name for mine own."

His hand clutched the bedpost. "They had killed your husband, madam, at a little inn in Deptford, and said I was the murdered man, not he. They testified that I had fought them over the reckoning of the bill, and they, in self-defense, had stabbed me. They told me this with pride, as of a job well done."

He stood, clasping the bedpost as it were a walking stick. "The queen's anger would have passed. The murder never. Your husband has had his revenge on me, madam. He took my life as sure as I took his."

I heard a sound from out the room. I waited, listening. I went, treading softly, into the gallery, but there was no one on the stairs, only the sound of laughter from below, and Drayton's voice. I came back in the room.

"How came my husband to that inn?" I asked.

"They lured him thence with promise of a part to play. He being an actor, they had seen him on the stage and marked his likeness to me. They passed a whole day with him ere they killed him, drawing him out with wine and questions, what were his habits, who his friends, that I might better play the masquerade. He did not tell them that he had a wife and children." He paced the narrow space between the bed and my skirts, and turned and paced again. "They even coaxed him to sign his name to a paper that I might copy it."

"And your deception succeeded?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes. The lodgings where I had stayed that fortnight since were his. I had already fool'd the owner of the house and all the neighbors without intention." There was another gust of laughter from below.

"What happened to your friends?"

"My friends," he said bitterly. "They were acquitted. Walsingham found me not over-grateful for his help and Poley's and has not seen me since. Skeres is in prison. Of Frizer, I know not. I heard that he was dead, but one cannot believe all that one hears."

"And none knew you?"

"No." He sat him down again. "I have been he this twenty years, and been not found out. Until now." He smiled a little. "What would you have me do, madam, now you have caught me out? Leave you in peace as I found you? I could away tomorrow, called to London, and not return. Or publicly confess my crime. What would you? I will do what you command."

"What's all this?" Drayton's voice bellowed from the stairs, "How now? The coverlet already off the bed? The host and his wife off to slumber so soon?" He lumbered into the room. "The dinner's not yet served, though you two feast your eyes upon each other." He laughed, and his very stomach shook with it, but when he turned his eyes to me, there was no laughter in them. "Good madam, I know we have dallied long upon the road, but tell me not 'tis time for bed so soon, supper missed, and all the trenchers cleared away. Tell me not that, or you shall break my heart."

He had stood up when Drayton came in, taking the weight of his body on his bad leg as if it were some lesson in pain, but he looked not at Drayton.

"For God's sake, come, man!" Drayton said, plucking at his arm. "I grow thinner by the minute!"

"Master Drayton, you are a most importunate guest," he said, looking at me.

"Whatever it is you speak of, sure it bears waiting till after supper."

"Yes," I said, "it hath already waited a long time."

"I am so cold," he said. I knelt beside the chest and took a quilt from out it. He raised himself to watch me. "What keep you in that chest now?"

I lay the quilt over him. "Sheets and pillowcoats and candles."

" 'Tis better so," he said. "Hast thou burned them all?"

"Aye, husband."

"I copied out his name so oft it was almost my own, but they are in my hand. If any come for them, you must say you burned them with the bedding when I died."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I hear a sound upon the stairs," I said. I hastened to the door. "I am glad you've come, son-in-law," I said softly. "His fever is worse."

John set a lidded cup upon the press and put his hand upon my husband's brow. "Thou hast a fever."

"I feel no fever," he said. He spoke through chattering teeth. "I am as two people lying side by side in the bed, both like to freeze. A little sack would warm me."

"I have somewhat for you better than sack." He slid his hand behind my husband's head to raise him to sitting. I put the pillows behind. "Drink you this."

"What is it?"

"A decoction of herbs. Flavored with cloves and syrup of violets. Come, father-in-law," John said kindly. " 'Twill help your fever."

He drank a swallow. "Vile potion!" he said. "Why did you not pour it in my ear and be done with it?" His hands shivered so that the liquid splashed onto the bedclothes, but he drank it down and gave the cup to John.

"Would you lie down again, husband?" I said, my hand to the pillows.

"Nay, leave them," he said. " 'Tis easier to breathe."

"Is there naught else I can do to help him?" I said, drawing John aside.

"See he has warm coverings and clean bedding."

" 'Tis freshly changed, and the featherbed on the bed new. I made it with my own hands."

"The second-best bed," my husband said, and turned, and slept.

We went downstairs, Drayton between us like a father who has caught his children kissing in a corner, prattling of beds and supper so that we could not speak. "Come, man," Drayton said, "you've not had any sack from your own bowl."

The board was already laid. Judith was spreading the cloth, Joan bringing in the salts, little Elizabeth laying the spoons. Joan said, "You once again would steal my brother from me, Anne. You never were so affectionate in the old days."

I know not what I answered her, nor what I did, whether I served the fowl first or the sugar-meats, nor what I ate. All I could think of was that my husband was dead. I had not guessed that, through all the years when no word came and Old John cursed me for a shrew that had driven him away. I had not guessed it e'en when Old John nailed the coat of arms above the door of our new house.

I had thought mayhap he had suffered us to be stolen by a thief, as a careless man will let his pocket be picked, or that he'd lost us gaming, staking us all as he had staked my mother's plate, and the winner would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ISAAC ASIMOV

takes you on an action adventure... inside the human mind.

The Grandmaster of Science Fiction and pioneer of the far reaches of the universe now returns to *inner* space. Twenty years after his groundbreaking bestseller *Fantastic Voyage*, Isaac Asimov takes us to the last frontier left to man—the human brain. Told with remarkable realism and electrifying suspense, FANTASTIC VOYAGE II: DESTINATION BRAIN is sure to become the newest classic of the genre.

FANTASTIC VOYAGE II

DESTINATION BRAIN

The book everyone has been waiting for. Doubleday

Book-of-the-Month Club and Quality Paperback Book Club Featured Selection

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come to claim us, house and all. But he had not. My husband had been murdered and laid in someone else's grave.

He sat at the head of the table, Drayton beside him. Drayton would not allow Elizabeth to be sent from table after she said her grace, but bade her sit on his broad knee. He talked and talked, following one story with another.

Joan sulked and preened by turns. Judith sat between Fox and Frill, feeding first one, then the other, her smiles and glances. "Remember you your father?" the Fox asked. "Had he a limp then?"

She answered him, all innocence, the way her father must have answered his assassins. He would have seen only what his desire showed him, 'twas ever his failing. And his father's, who could not see a stranger's face, so blinded was he by the colors on his coat-of-arms. His sister's failing, too, who could not e'en see over a starch'd ruff. All blind, and he the worst. He would not even have seen the knife blade coming.

When the meal was already done and the dishes carried away, Susanna's husband John came in, covered with snow, and was sat, and dishes warmed, and questions asked. "This is my grandfather," Elizabeth said.

"Well met, at last," John said, but I saw, watching from the kitchen, that he frowned. "I have been overlong at the birth of a cobbler's son, and overlong coming home."

Drayton called for a toast to the new babe, and then another. "We must toast Elizabeth's birth, for we were not present at her christening," he said. "Ah, and gave her not a christening gift." He bade Elizabeth look in his ear.

She stood on tiptoe, her eyes round. "There's naught in there but dirt," she said.

Drayton laughed merrily. "Thou hast not looked well," he said and pulled a satin ribbon from out his ear.

" 'Tis a trick," Elizabeth said solemnly, "is it not, grandsire?"

"Aye, a trick," he said. She climbed into his lap.

"He is not as I remembered him," Susanna said, watching him tie the ribbon in Bess's hair.

"Thou wert but four years old and Judith a babe when he left. Dost thou remember him?"

"Only a little. I feared he would be like Aunt Joan, dressed in the fashion, playing the part of master of the house though he did not merit it."

"It is his house," I said, and thought of the name on the deed, the name that they had cajoled my husband into signing that he might copy it. "And all in it purchased with his money."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Marry, it is his house, though he never saw it till now," she said. "I feared he would claim the house for his own, and us with it."

He fastened the ribbon clumsily, tying it round a lock of Bess's hair. "But he plays not that part," I said.

"No. Knowest thou what he said to me, Mother, when I brought him his sack? He said, 'Thy father was a fool to ever leave thee.' "

John Hall came and stood beside us, watching the tying of the ribbon. "Look how her ribbon comes loose," Susanna said. "I'll go and tie it."

She went to Bess and would have tied the ribbon, but she tossed her head naughtily.

"My grandfather will do't," she said, and backed against his knees.

"My hands are too clumsy for this business, daughter," he said. The lines had softened already in his face. He looked to her, and she leaning o'er him, told him to loop the ribbon so and then to pull it through. Judith came and stood beside, smiling and advising.

"Notice you aught amiss about your husband?" John said.

"Amiss?" I said. I could not catch my breath. I had forgot that he had been to Cambridge, and to London, a learned man.

"I fear that he is ill."

Bess ran to us. "Father!" she cried. "Look you at my new ribbon," and ran back again. "Grandsire, is't not pretty?" She fairly leapt into his arms and kissed him on the cheek.

"Sweet Bess, 'twas not my gift, but Drayton's."

"But you tied it."

"Is he very ill?" I said.

John looked kindly at me. "This country air will make him well again, and your kind ministrations. Shall we into the hall?"

"Nay," I said. "I must go up to make the bed."

I went out through the kitchen. The Fox and Frill stood by the stairs, whispering together. "You are mad," the Frill said. "Look how his family greets him, his daughters gathering round him. It was an idle rumor, and no more."

I hid inside the kitchen door that I might hear their conversation.

"His daughters were but babes when they last saw him," the Fox said.

"The sister says he has changed not at all."

"The sister is a fool. His wife greeted him not so eagerly. Saw you how she stood as a statue when first we came? 'Tis she should be the subject of our watch."

I came into the hall. They bowed to me. The Fox would have spoken, but Drayton came and said, "Good mistress, I had missed you in the hall."

"I'll follow you in a little. I would make up the second-best bed."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, I'll accompany thee," he said. "And you two see to the horses. They've not been fed."

The Fox and Frill put on their cloaks and went out into the snow. Drayton climbed the stairs after me, puffing and talking the while. I went into my room and lit the candles.

He looked about him. "A great reckoning in a little room," he said in a gentler voice than before. "I advised against his coming. I said it was not safe while any still lived who knew him, but he would see the daughters. Does the sister know?"

"Nay," I said. I laid the coverlid upon the bed and looked to put it so that it hung straight. I set the bolsters at the head of the bed. "Who is he?"

He sat upon the press, his hands on his stout knees. "There was a time I could have answered you," he said. "I knew him long ago."

"Before the murder?"

"Before the murders."

"They killed others?" I said. "Besides my husband?"

"Only one other," he said. His voice downstairs had been loud and bold, an actor's voice, but now it was so low I could scarce hear him, as though he spoke to himself. "You asked me who he is. I know not, though he was but a young man when first I knew him, a roguish young man, full of ambition and touched by genius, but reckless, overproud, taking thought only for himself." He stopped and sat, rubbing his hands along his thighs. "Walsingham's henchmen killed more men than they knew that wicked day at Deptford. I saw him on the street afterwards and knew him not, he was so changed. I would show you something," he said, and raised himself awkwardly. He went to the chest in the corner, opened it, and proffered me the papers that lay therein. "Read them," he said.

I gave them back to him. "I cannot read."

"Then all is lost," he said. "I thought to bargain with you for his life with these his plays."

"To buy me."

"I think you cannot be bought, but, aye, I would buy you any way I could to keep him safe. He hath been ill these two winters past. He has need of your refuge. The London air is bad for him, and there are rumors, from whence I know not."

"The young men you brought here have heard them."

"Aye, and wait their chance. I know that naught can replace your husband."

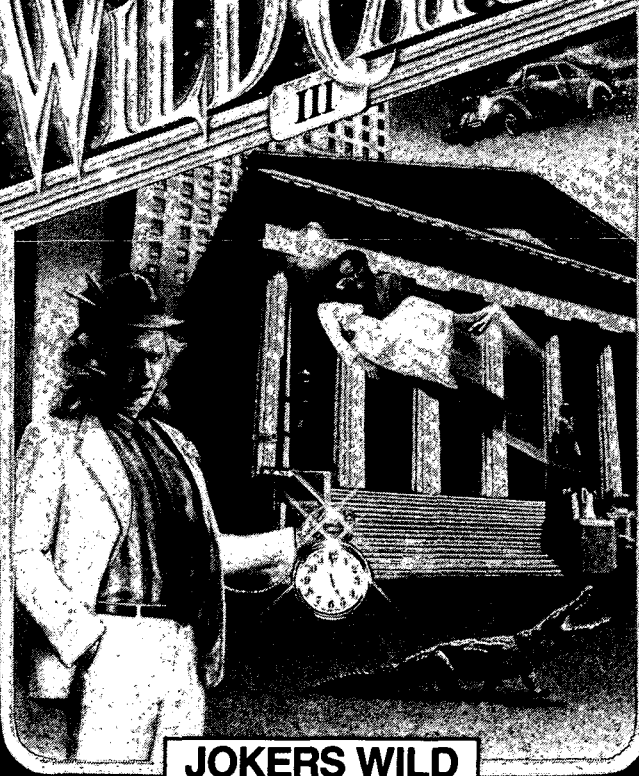
"No," I said, thinking of how he had stolen my honor and my mother's plate and run away to London.

"You cannot bring your husband back from the dead, if you tell all the world. You will but cause another murder. I'll not say one man's life is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

YOU WON'T BELIEVE
WHAT HAPPENS
NEXT.

WILD CARDS
III



JOKERS WILD

The extraordinary new chapter in the
secret history of our times.

Edited by George R.R. Martin.

BANTAM
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND
SPECTRA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

worth more than another's." He brandished the papers. "No, by God, I will say it! Your husband could not have written words like these. This man is worth a hundred men, and I'll not see him hanged."

He lay the papers back into the chest and closed the lid. "Let us go back to London, and keep silence."

Elizabeth ran into the room. "Come, granddame, come. We are to have a play."

"A play?" Drayton said. He lifted Elizabeth up into his arms. "Madam, he has no life save what you grant him," he said, and carried her down the stairs.

"The decoction will make him sleep," John Hall said.

He slept already, his face less lined in rest. "And quench the fever?"

He shook his head. "I know not if it will. I fear it is his heart that brings it on."

He put the cup into the pouch he carried. "I give you this," he said. He proffered me a sheaf of papers, closely writ.

"What is't?"

"My journal. Thy husband's illness is there, my treatments of it, and all my thoughts. I'd have thee burn it."

"Why?"

"We have been friends these three years. We'd drink a cup of ale, and sit, and talk. One day he chanced to speak of a play he'd writ, a sad play of a man who'd bartered his soul to the devil. He spoke of it as if he had forgot that I was with him: how it was writ and when, where acted. He marked not that I looked at him with wonder, and after a little, we went on to other things."

He closed the pouch. "The play he spoke of was Kit Marlowe's, who was killed in a brawl at Deptford these long years since." He took the papers back from me and thrust them in the candle's flame.

"Hast thou told Susanna?"

"I would not twice deprive her of a father." The pages flamed. He thrust them in the grate and watched them burn.

"His worry is all Susanna's inheritance," I said, "and Judith's. He bade me burn his plays."

"And Marlowe's?" he said, dividing the charring pages with his foot that they might the better burn. "Hast thou done it?"

A little piece of blackened paper flew up, the writing all burnt away. "Yes," I said.

"Judith said we are to have a play," Elizabeth said as we descended the stairs. She freed herself from Drayton's arms and ran into the hall.

"Judith?" I said, and looked to where she stood. The Fox was at her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side, his feathered cap wet with snow. He leaned against the wall, seeming not even to listen. The Frill squatted by the hearth, stretching his hands to the fire.

"Oh, grandsire, prithee do!" Elizabeth said, half climbing in his lap. "I never saw a play."

"Yes, brother, a play," Joan said.

Drayton stepped between them. "We are too few for a company, Mistress Bess," he said, pulling at Elizabeth's ribbon to make her laugh, "and the hour too late."

"Only a little one, grandsire?" she begged.

"It is too late," he said, looking at me. "But you shall have your play."

The Fox stepped forward, too quick, taking the Frill by the sleeve and pulling him to his feet. "What shall we, Master Will?" he said, smiling with his sharp teeth. "A play within a play?"

"Aye," Drayton said loudly. "Let us do Bottom's troupe at Pyramus and Thisbe."

The Fox smiled wider. "Or the mousetrap?" All of them looked at him, Judith smiling, the Fox waiting to snap, Master Drayton with a face taken suddenly sober. But he looked not at them, nor at Bess, who had climbed into his lap. He looked at me.

"A sad tale's best for winter," he said. He turned to the Frill. "Do ye the letter scene from measure. Begin ye, 'Let this Barnardine.' "

The Frill struck a pose, his hand raised in the air as if to strike. " 'Let this Barnardine be this morning executed and his head borne to Angelo,' " he said in a loud voice.

He stopped, his finger pointing toward the Fox, who did not answer.

Drayton said, " 'Tis an old play. They know it not. Come, let's have Bottom. I'll act the ass."

"If they know not the play, then I'll explain it," the Fox said. "The play is named *Measure for Measure*. It is the story of a young man who is in difficulty with the law and would be hanged, but another is killed in his place." He pointed at the Frill. "Play out the play."

" 'Let this Barnardine be this morning executed and his head borne to Angelo,' " the Frill said.

The Fox looked at Drayton. " 'Angelo hath seen them both, and will discover the favor.' "

The Frill smiled, and it was a smile less slack-jawed and more cruel than I had seen, a wolfen smile. " 'Oh, Death's a great disguiser,' " he said.

"An end to this!" I said.

Both of them looked at me, Fox and Frill, disturbed from their prey.

"The child is half asleep," I said.

"I am not!" Bess said, rubbing at her eyes, which made the party laugh.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I stood her down from off his lap. "Thou mayest have plays tomorrow, and tomorrow, and the next day. Thy grandfather is home to stay."

Susanna hurried forward. "Good night, Father. I am well content that you are home." She fastened Bess's cloak about her neck.

"Will you a play for me tomorrow, grandsire?" Bess said.

He stroked her hair. "Aye, tomorrow."

Bess flung her arms about his neck. "Good night, grandsire."

John Hall picked up the child in his arms. She lay her head upon his shoulder. "I will take the actors with us," John said softly to me. "I trust them not in the house with Judith."

He turned to the Fox and Frill and said in a loud voice, "Gentlemen, you're to bed with us tonight. Will you come now? Aunt Joan, we will walk you home."

"Nay," Joan said haughtily, stretching her neck to look more proud. Her ruff moaned and creaked. "I would stay awhile, and them with me."

John opened the door, and they went out into the snow, Elizabeth already asleep.

"Marry, now they are gone, we'll have our play, brother."

"Nay," I said, kneeling to put my hands in his. "I am a wife long-parted from her husband. I would to bed with him ere sunrise."

"You loved not your husband so well in the old days," Joan said, her hands upon her hips. "Brother, you will not let her rule you?"

"I shall do whatever she wills."

"I know a scene will do us perfectly," Drayton said. He spread his arms. " 'Our revels now are ended.' " He donned his wide cloak. "Come, Mistress Joan, I will accompany thee to thy home and these two to Hall's croft and thence to a tavern for a drop or two of sack ere I return."

Judith walked with them to the far end of the hall and opened the door. I knelt still with his hands in mine. "Why did you this?" he asked. "Hath Drayton purchased you with pity?"

"Nay," I said softly. "You cannot leave. Your daughters would be sad to have you go, and you have promised Elizabeth a play. You asked if there was aught that you could do for them. Be thou their father."

"I will and you will answer me one question. Tell me when you discovered me."

"I knew you ere you came."

His hands clasped mine.

"When Hamnet died, and Old John went to London to tell my husband," I said, "he came home with a coat of arms he said his son had got for him, but I believed him not. His son, my husband, would ne'er have raised his hand to help his father or to give his daughters a house to dwell in. I knew it was not he who did us such kindness, but another."

"All these long years I thought that none knew me, that all believed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me dead. And so it was as I were dead, and buried in Deptford, and he the one who lived. But you knew me."

"Yes."

"And hated me not, though I had killed your husband."

"I knew not he was dead. I thought he'd lost us dicing, or sold us to a kinder master."

"Sold?" he said. "What manner of man would sell such treasure?"

" 'The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve. Good night, good rest!' " Drayton called from the door. " 'Sweet suitors, to bed.' "

I rose from where I knelt, holding still to his hands. "Come, husband," I said. "The bed at last is made, in time for bed."

"The bed," he said, so weak I scarce could hear him.

"What is't, husband?"

"I have left you a remembrance in the will." He smiled at me. "I will not tell you of it now. 'Twill please thee to hear it when the will is read."

He had forgot that I sat by him when he made his will.

"John's foul decoction hath made me better," he said. "I am as one again, not split in two."

I laid my hand upon his brow. It was more hot than ever. I went to fetch another quilt from out the chest.

"Nay, come and sit with me and hold my hands," he said. "I have paid the sexton a French crown to write a curse upon my grave, that none will dig me up and say, 'That is not he.' "

"Prithee, speak not of dying," I said.

"I wrote not mine own will, but signed it only. They had him write out his name ere they killed him, that I might copy it."

"I know, husband. Soft, do not fret thyself with—"

"It matters not whose name is on the plays, so that my daughters' inheritance is safe. Hast thou burnt them all?"

"Yes," I said, but I have not. I have sewn them in the new featherbed. I will ensure it is not burnt with the bedding when he dies, and so will keep them safe, save the house itself burns down. I will do naught to endanger their inheritance nor the love they bear their father, but in after years the papers can be found and his true name set on them. The clew lies in the will.

"Wife, come sit by me and hold my hands," he says, though I hold them already. "I have left thee something in the will, a token of that night when first I came. I have bequeathed to thee the second-best bed." ●

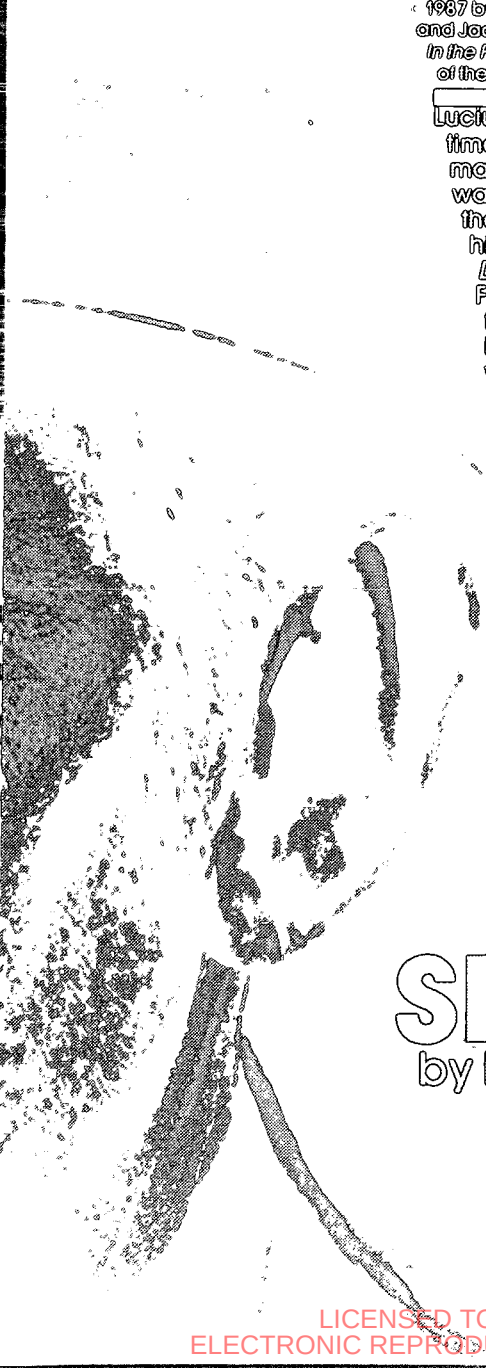
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

© 1987 by Jeanne Van Buren Dann and Jack Dann. Reprinted from *In the Field of Fire* by permission of the author.

Lucius Shepard has proven, time and again, that he is a master of the science fiction war story. In many of the tales that we've published, and in his most recent novel, *Life During Wartime* (Bantam New Fiction), he expertly depicts a futuristic war in Central America. Now, in one of his most powerful works to date, Mr. Shepard presents us with the chilling story of one man's eerie reunion with another veteran in post-war Vietnam. A word of warning: this story contains brief scenes which may be disturbing to some.

art: J.K. Potter



SHADES

by Lucius Shepard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This little gook cadre with a pitted complexion drove me through the heart of Saigon—I couldn't relate to it as Ho Chi Minh City—and checked me into the Hotel Heroes of Tet, a place that must have been quietly elegant and very French back in the days when philosophy was discussed over Cointreau rather than practiced in the streets, but now was filled with cheap production-line furniture and tinted photographs of Uncle Ho. Glaring at me, the cadre suggested I would be advised to keep to my room until I left for Cam Le; to annoy him I strolled into the bar, where a couple of Americans—reporters, their table laden with notebooks and tape cassettes—were drinking shots from a bottle of George Dickel. "How's it goin'?" I said, ambling over. "Name's Tom Puleo. I'm doin' a piece on Stoner for *Esquire*."

The bigger of them—chubby, red-faced guy about my age, maybe thirty-five, thirty-six—returned a fishy stare; but the younger one, who was thin and tanned and weaselly handsome, perked up and said, "Hey, you're the guy was in Stoner's outfit, right?" I admitted it, and the chubby guy changed his attitude. He put on a welcome-to-the-lodge smile, stuck out a hand and introduced himself as Ed Fierman, *Chicago Sun-Times*. His pal, he said, was Ken Witcover, CNN.

They tried to draw me out about Stoner, but I told them maybe later, that I wanted to unwind from the airplane ride, and we proceeded to do damage to the whiskey. By the time we'd sucked down three drinks, Fierman and I were into some heavy reminiscence. Turned out he had covered the war during my tour and knew my old top. Witcover was cherry in Vietnam, so he just tried to look wise and to laugh in the right spots. It got pretty drunk at that table. A security cadre—fortyish, cadaverous gook in yellow fatigues—sat nearby, cocking an ear toward us, and we pretended to be engaged in subversive activity, whispering and drawing maps on napkins. But it was Stoner who was really on all our minds, and Fierman—the drunkest of us—finally broached the subject, saying, "A machine that traps ghosts! It's just like the gooks to come up with something that goddamn worthless!"

Witcover shushed him, glancing nervously at the security cadre, but Fierman was beyond caution. "They coulda done humanity a service," he said, chuckling. "Turned alla Russians into women or something. But, nah! The gooks get behind worthlessness. They may claim to be Marxists, but at heart they still wanna be inscrutable."

"So," said Witcover to me, ignoring Fierman, "when you gonna fill us in on Stoner?"

I didn't care much for Witcover. It wasn't anything personal; I simply wasn't fond of his breed: compulsively neat (pencils lined up, name inscribed on every possession), edgy, on the make. I dislike him the way

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some people dislike yappy little dogs. But I couldn't argue with his desire to change the subject. "He was a good soldier," I said.

Fierman let out a mulish guffaw. "Now that," he said, "that's what I call in-depth analysis."

Witcover snickered.

"Tell you the truth"—I scowled at him, freighting my words with malice—"I hated the son of a bitch. He had this young-professor air, this way of lookin' at you as if you were an interestin' specimen. And he came across pure phony. Y'know, the kind who's always talkin' like a black dude, sayin' 'right on' and shit, and sayin' it all wrong."

"Doesn't seem much reason for hating him," said Witcover, and by his injured tone, I judged I had touched a nerve. Most likely he had once entertained soul-brother pretensions.

"Maybe not. Maybe if I'd met him back home, I'd have passed him off as a creep and gone about my business. But in combat situations, you don't have the energy to maintain that sort of neutrality. It's easier to hate. And anyway, Stoner could be a genuine pain in the ass."

"How's that?" Fierman asked, getting interested.

"It was never anything unforgivable; he just never let up with it. Like one time a bunch of us were in this guy Gurney's hooch, and he was tellin' 'bout this badass he'd known in Detroit. The cops had been chasin' this guy across the rooftops, and he'd missed a jump. Fell seven floors and emptied his gun at the cops on the way down. Reaction was typical. Guys sayin' 'Wow,' and tryin' to think of a story to top it. But Stoner he nods sagely and says, 'Yeah, there's a lot of that goin' around.' As if this was a syndrome to which he's devoted years of study. But you knew he didn't have a clue, that he was too upscale to have met anybody like Gurney's badass." I had a slug of whiskey. " 'There's a lot of that goin' around' was a totally inept comment. All it did was to bring everyone down from a nice buzz and make us aware of the shithole where we lived."

Witcover looked puzzled but Fierman made a noise that seemed to imply comprehension. "How'd he die?" he asked. "The handout says he was KIA, but it doesn't say what kind of action."

"The fuck-up kind," I said. I didn't want to tell them. The closer I came to seeing Stoner, the leerier I got about the topic. Until this business had begun, I thought I'd buried all the death-tripping weirdness of Vietnam; now Stoner had unearthed it and I was having dreams again and I hated him for that worse than I ever had in life. What was I supposed to do? Feel sorry for him? Maybe ghosts didn't have bad dreams. Maybe it was terrific being a ghost, like with Casper. . . . Anyway, I did tell them. How we had entered Cam Le, what was left of the patrol. How we had lined up the villagers, interrogated them, hit them, and God knows we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might have killed them—we were freaked, bone-weary, an atrocity waiting to happen—if Stoner hadn't distracted us. He'd been wandering around, poking at stuff with his rifle, and then, with this ferocious expression on his face, he'd fired into one of the huts. The hut had been empty, but there must have been explosives hidden inside, because after a few rounds the whole damn thing had blown and taken Stoner with it.

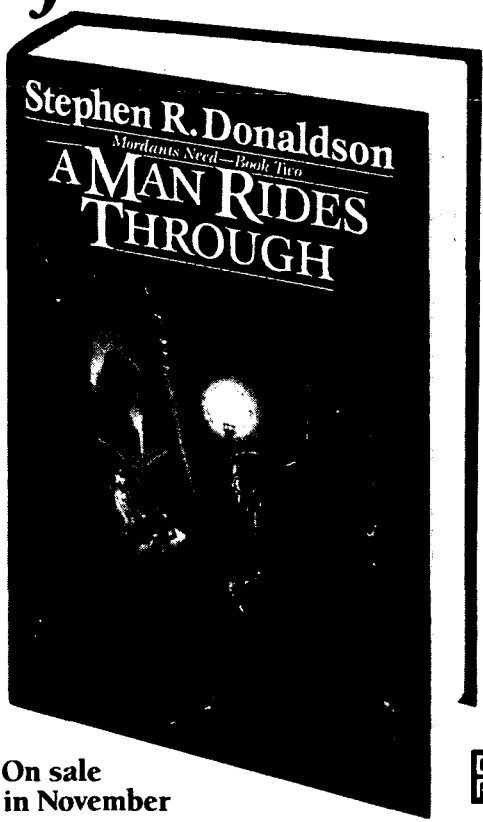
Talking about him soured me on company, and shortly afterward I broke it off with Fierman and Witcover, and walked out into the city. The security cadre tagged along, his hand resting on the butt of his sidearm. I had a real load on and barely noticed my surroundings. The only salient points of difference between Saigon today and fifteen years before were the ubiquitous representations of Uncle Ho that covered the facades of many of the buildings, and the absence of motor scooters: the traffic consisted mainly of bicycles. I went a dozen blocks or so and stopped at a sidewalk café beneath sun-browned tamarinds, where I paid two dong for food tickets, my first experience with what the Communists called "goods exchange"—a system they hoped would undermine the concept of monetary trade; I handed the tickets to the waitress and she gave me a bottle of beer and a dish of fried peanuts. The security cadre, who had taken a table opposite mine, seemed no more impressed with the system than was I; he chided the waitress for her slowness and acted perturbed by the complexity accruing to his order of tea and cakes.

I sat and sipped and stared, thoughtless and unfocused. The bicyclists zipping past were bright blurs with jingling bells, and the light was that heavy leaded-gold light that occurs when a tropical sun has broken free of an overcast. Smells of charcoal, fish sauce, grease. The heat squeezed sweat from my every pore. I was brought back to alertness by angry voices. The security cadre was arguing with the waitress, insisting that the recorded music be turned on, and she was explaining that there weren't enough customers to warrant turning it on. He began to offer formal "constructive criticism," making clear that he considered her refusal both a breach of party ethics and the code of honorable service. About then, I realized I had begun to cry. Not sobs, just tears leaking. The tears had nothing to do with the argument or the depersonalized ugliness it signaled. I believe that the heat and the light and the smells had seeped into me, triggering a recognition of an awful familiarity that my mind had thus far rejected. I wiped my face and tried to suck it up before anyone could notice my emotionality; but a teenage boy on a bicycle slowed and gazed at me with an amused expression. To show my contempt, I spat on the sidewalk. Almost instantly, I felt much better.

Early the next day, thirty of us—all journalists—were bussed north to Cam Le. Mist still wreathed the paddies, the light had a yellowish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The shimmering conclusion to the national bestseller, *The Mirror of Her Dreams!*



At the end of *The Mirror of Her Dreams*, Terisa Morgan found herself in a bad situation that was rapidly getting worse. Geraden, accused of murdering his brother, had escaped through a mirror into the unknown... and the monstrous evil loosed on the kingdom threatened everyone!

A Del Rey Hardcover

$19.95

On sale in November

DEL REY #1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

green cast, and along the road women in black dresses were waiting for a southbound bus, with rumpled sacks of produce like sleepy brown animals at their feet. I sat beside Fierman, who, being as hung over as I was, made no effort at conversation; however, Witcover—sitting across the aisle—peppered me with inane questions until I told him to leave me alone. Just before we turned onto the dirt road that led to Cam Le, an information cadre boarded the bus and for the duration proceeded to fill us in on everything we already knew. Stuff about the machine, how its fields were generated, and so forth. Technical jargon gives me a pain, and I tried hard not to listen. But then he got off onto a tack that caught my interest. "Since the machine has been in operation," he said, "the apparition seems to have grown more vital."

"What's that mean?" I asked, waving my hand to attract his attention. "Is he coming back to life?"

My colleagues laughed.

The cadre pondered this. "It simply means that his effect has become more observable," he said at last. And beyond that he would not specify.

Cam Le had been evacuated, its population shifted to temporary housing three miles east. The village itself was nothing like the place I had entered fifteen years before. Goné were the thatched huts, and in their stead were about two dozen small houses of concrete block painted a quarantine yellow, with banana trees set between them. All this encircled by thick jungle. Standing on the far side of the road from the group of houses was the long tin-roofed building that contained the machine. Two soldiers were lounging in front of it, and as the bus pulled up, they snapped to attention; a clutch of officers came out the door, followed by a portly, white-haired gook: Phan Thnah Tuu, the machine's inventor. I disembarked and studied him while he shook hands with the other journalists; it wasn't every day that I met someone who claimed to be both Marxist and mystic, and had gone more than the required mile in establishing the validity of each. His hair was as fine as cornsilk, a fat black mole punctuated one cheek, and his benign smile was unflagging, seeming a fixture of some deeply held good opinion attaching to everything he saw. Maybe, I thought, Fierman was right. In-fucking-scrutable.

"Ah," he said, coming up, enveloping me in a cloud of perfumy cologne. "Mr. Puleo. I hope this won't be painful for you."

"Really," I said. "You hope that, do you?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, taken aback.

"It's okay." I grinned. "You're forgiven."

An unsmiling major led him away to press more flesh, and he glanced back at me, perplexed. I was mildly ashamed of having fucked with him, but unlike Cassius Clay, I had plenty against them Viet Congs. Besides, my wiseass front was helping to stave off the yips.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After a brief welcome-to-the-wonderful-wacky-world-of-the-Commie-techno-paradise speech given by the major, Tuu delivered an oration upon the nature of ghosts, worthy of mention only in that it rehashed every crackpot notion I'd ever heard: apparently Stoner hadn't yielded much in the way of hard data. He then warned us to keep our distance from the village. The fields would not harm us; they were currently in operation, undetectable to our senses and needing but a slight manipulation to "focus" Stoner. But if we were to pass inside the fields, it was possible that Stoner himself might be able to cause us injury. With that, Tuu bowed and reentered the building.

We stood facing the village, which—with its red dirt and yellow houses and green banana leaves—looked elementary and innocent under the leaden sky. Some of my colleagues whispered together, others checked their cameras. I felt numb and shaky, prepared to turn away quickly, much the way I once had felt when forced to identify the body of a chance acquaintance at a police morgue. Several minutes after Tuu had left us, there was a disturbance in the air at the center of the village. Similar to heat haze, but the ripples were slower. And then, with the suddenness of a slide shunted into a projector, Stoner appeared.

I think I had been expecting something bloody and ghoulish, or perhaps a gauzy, insubstantial form; but he looked no different than he had on the day he died. Haggard; wearing sweat-stained fatigues; his face half-obscured by a week's growth of stubble. On his helmet were painted the words *Didi Mao* ("Fuck Off" in Vietnamese), and I could make out the yellowing photograph of his girl that he'd taped to his rifle stock. He didn't act startled by our presence; on the contrary, his attitude was nonchalant. He shouldered his rifle, tipped back his helmet and sauntered toward us. He seemed to be recessed into the backdrop: it was as if reality were two-dimensional and he was a cutout held behind it to give the illusion of depth. At least that's how it was one moment. The next, he would appear to be set forward of the backdrop like a pop-up figure in a fancy greeting card. Watching him shift between these modes was unsettling . . . more than unsettling. My heart hammered, my mouth was cottony. I bumped into someone and realized that I had been backing away, that I was making a scratchy noise deep in my throat. Stoner's eyes, those eyes that had looked dead even in life, pupils about .45 caliber and hardly any iris showing, they were locked onto mine and the pressure of his stare was like two black bolts punching through into my skull.

"Puleo," he said.

I couldn't hear him, but I saw his lips shape the name. With a mixture of longing and hopelessness harrowing his features, he kept on repeating it. And then I noticed something else. The closer he drew to me, the more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in focus he became. It wasn't just a matter of the shortening distance; his stubble and sweat stains, the frays in his fatigues, his worry lines—all these were sharpening the way details become fixed in a developing photograph. But none of that disturbed me half as much as did the fact of a dead man calling my name. I couldn't handle that. I began to hyperventilate, to get dizzy, and I believe I might have blacked out; but before that could happen, Stoner reached the edge of the fields, the barrier beyond which he could not pass.

Had I had more mental distance from the event, I might have enjoyed the sound-and-light that ensued: it was spectacular. The instant Stoner hit the end of his tether, there was an ear-splitting shriek of the kind metal emits under immense stress; it seemed to issue from the air, the trees, the earth, as if some ironclad physical constant had been breached. Stoner was frozen midstep, his mouth open, and opaque lightnings were forking away from him, taking on a violet tinge as they vanished, their passage illuminating the curvature of the fields. I heard a scream and assumed it must be Stoner. But somebody grabbed me, shook me, and I understood that I was the one screaming, screaming with throat-tearing abandon because his eyes were boring into me and I could have sworn that his thoughts, his sensations, were flowing to me along the track of his vision. I knew what he was feeling: not pain, not desperation, but emptiness. An emptiness made unbearable by his proximity to life, to fullness. It was the worst thing I'd ever felt, worse than grief and bullet wounds, and it had to be worse than dying—dying, you see, had an end, whereas this went on and on, and every time you thought you had adapted to it, it grew worse yet. I wanted it to stop. That was all I wanted. Ever. Just for it to stop.

Then, with the same abruptness that he had appeared, Stoner winked out of existence and the feeling of emptiness faded.

People pressed in, asking questions. I shouldered them aside and walked off a few paces. My hands were shaking, my eyes weepy. I stared at the ground. It looked blurred, an undifferentiated smear of green with a brown clot in the middle: this gradually resolved into grass and my left shoe. Ants were crawling over the laces, poking their heads into the eyelets. The sight was strengthening, a reassurance of the ordinary.

"Hey, man." Witcover hove up beside me. "You okay?" He rested a hand on my shoulder. I kept my eyes on the ants, saying nothing. If it had been anyone else, I might have responded to his solicitude; but I knew he was only sucking up to me, hoping to score some human interest for his satellite report. I glanced at him. He was wearing a pair of mirrored sunglasses, and that consolidated my anger. Why is it, I ask you, that every measly little wimp in the universe thinks he can put on a pair of mirrored sunglasses and instantly acquire magical hipness and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PIERS ANTHONY'S
WORLDS OF CHTHON

P·L·A·S·M

A NEW SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL BY

CHARLES PLATT

In 1968, Piers Anthony stunned the science fiction world with *Chthon*, the story of Acton-Five, a sadistic halfbreed condemned to life on a sentient prison planet. The sequel, *Phthor*, culminated in the destruction of the planet and all the major characters, including Acton-Five. But was that *really* the end?

Now Piers Anthony has given Charles Platt permission to do the impossible—to create a new world from the ashes of the old—in a new Chthon novel which is sure to delight Piers Anthony's legions of fans and make Charles Platt a superstar in his own right.

PIERS ANTHONY: "I thought I knew all there was to know about *Chthon*—but *Plasm* opens up a new series of possibilities in a uniquely different style. Compelling and gripping."

$3.50

SIGNET SCIENCE FICTION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cool, rather than—as in this case—looking like an asshole with reflecting eyes?

"Fuck off," I told him in a tone that implied dire consequences were I not humored. He started to talk back, but thought better of it and stalked off. I returned to watching the ants; they were caravanning up inside my trousers and onto my calf. I would become a legend among them: The Human Who Stood Still for Biting.

From behind me came the sound of peremptory gook voices, angry American voices. I paid them no heed, content with my insect pals and the comforting state of thoughtlessness that watching them induced. A minute or so later, someone else moved up beside me and stood without speaking. I recognized Tuu's cologne and looked up. "Mr. Puleo," he said. "I'd like to offer you an exclusive on this story." Over his shoulder, I saw my colleagues staring at us through the windows of the bus, as wistful and forlorn as kids who have been denied Disneyland: they, like me, knew that big bucks were to be had from exploiting Stoner's plight.

"Why?" I asked.

"We want your help in conducting an experiment."

I waited for him to continue.

"Did you notice," he said, "that after Stoner identified you, his image grew sharper?"

I nodded.

"We're interested in observing the two of you in close proximity. His reaction to you was unique."

"You mean go in there?" I pointed to the village. "You said it was dangerous."

"Other subjects have entered the fields and shown no ill effects. But Stoner was not as intrigued by them as he was with you." Tuu brushed a lock of hair back from his forehead. "We have no idea of Stoner's capabilities, Mr. Puleo. It *is* a risk. But since you served in the Army, I assume you are accustomed to risk."

I let him try to persuade me—the longer I held out, the stronger my bargaining position—but I had already decided to accept the offer. Though I wasn't eager to feel that emptiness again, I had convinced myself that it had been a product of nerves and an overactive imagination; now that I had confronted Stoner, I believed I would be able to control my reactions. Tuu said that he would have the others driven back to Saigon, but I balked at that. I was not sufficiently secure to savor the prospect of being alone among the gooks, and I told Tuu I wanted Fierman and Witcover to stay. Why Witcover? At the time I might have said it was because he and Fierman were the only two of my colleagues whom I knew; but in retrospect, I think I may have anticipated the need for a whipping boy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We were quartered in a house at the eastern edge of the village, one that the fields did not enclose. Three cots were set up inside, along with a table and chairs; the yellow walls were brocaded with mildew, and weeds grew sideways from chinks in the concrete blocks. Light was provided by an oil lamp that—as darkness fell—sent an inconstant glow lapping over the walls, making it appear that the room was filled with dirty orange water.

After dinner Fierman produced a bottle of whiskey—his briefcase contained three more—and a deck of cards, and we sat down to while away the evening. The one game we all knew was Hearts, and we each played according to the dictates of our personalities. Fierman became quickly drunk and attempted to Shoot the Moon on every hand, no matter how bad his cards; he seemed to be asking fate to pity a fool. I paid little attention to the game, my ears tuned to the night sounds, half expecting to hear the sputter of small-arms fire, the rumor of some ghostly engagement; it was by dint of luck alone that I maintained second place. Witcover played conservatively, building his score through our mistakes, and though we were only betting a nickel a point, to watch him sweat out every trick you would have thought a fortune hung in the balance; he chortled over our pitiful fuck-ups, rolling his eyes and shaking his head in delight, and whistled as he totaled up his winnings. The self-importance he derived from winning fouled the atmosphere, and the room acquired the staleness of a cell where we had been incarcerated for years. Finally, after a particularly childish display of glee, I pushed back my chair and stood.

"Where you going?" asked Witcover. "Let's play."

"No, thanks," I said.

"Christ!" He picked up the discards and muttered something about sore losers.

"It's not that," I told him. "I'm worried if you win another hand, you're gonna come all over the fuckin' table. I don't wanna watch."

Fierman snorted laughter.

Witcover shot me an aggrieved look. "What's with you, man? You been on my case ever since the hotel."

I shrugged and headed for the door.

"Asshole," he said half under his breath.

"What?" An angry flush numbed my face as I turned back.

He tried to project an expression of manly belligerence, but his eyes darted from side to side.

"Asshole?" I said. "Is that right?" I took a step toward him.

Fierman scrambled up, knocking over his chair, and began pushing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me away. "C'mon," he said. "It's not worth it. Cool out." His boozy sincerity acted to diminish my anger, and I let him urge me out the door.

The night was moonless, with a few stars showing low on the horizon; the spiky crowns of the palms ringing the village were silhouettes pinned onto a lesser blackness. It was so humid, it felt like you could spoon in the air. I crossed the dirt road, found a patch of grass near the tin-roofed building and sat down. The door to the building was cracked, spilling a diagonal of white radiance onto the ground, and I had the notion that there was no machine inside, only a mystic boil of whiteness emanating from Tuu's silky hair. A couple of soldiers walked past and nodded to me; they paused a few feet farther along to light cigarettes, which proceeded to brighten and fade with the regularity of tiny beacons.

Crickets sawed, frogs chirred, and listening to them, smelling the odor of sweet rot from the jungle, I thought about a similar night when I'd been stationed at Phnoc Vinh, about a party we'd had with a company of artillery. There had been a barbecue pit and iced beer and our CO had given special permission for whores to come on the base. It had been a great party; in fact, those days at Phnoc Vinh had been the best time of the war for me. The artillery company had had this terrific cook, and on movie nights he'd make doughnuts. Jesus, I'd loved those doughnuts! They'd tasted like home, like peace. I'd kick back and munch a doughnut and watch the bullshit movie, and it was almost like being in my own living room, watching the tube. Trouble was, Phnoc Vinh had softened me up, and after three weeks, when we'd been airlifted to Quan Loi, which was constantly under mortar and rocket fire, I'd nearly gotten my ass blown off.

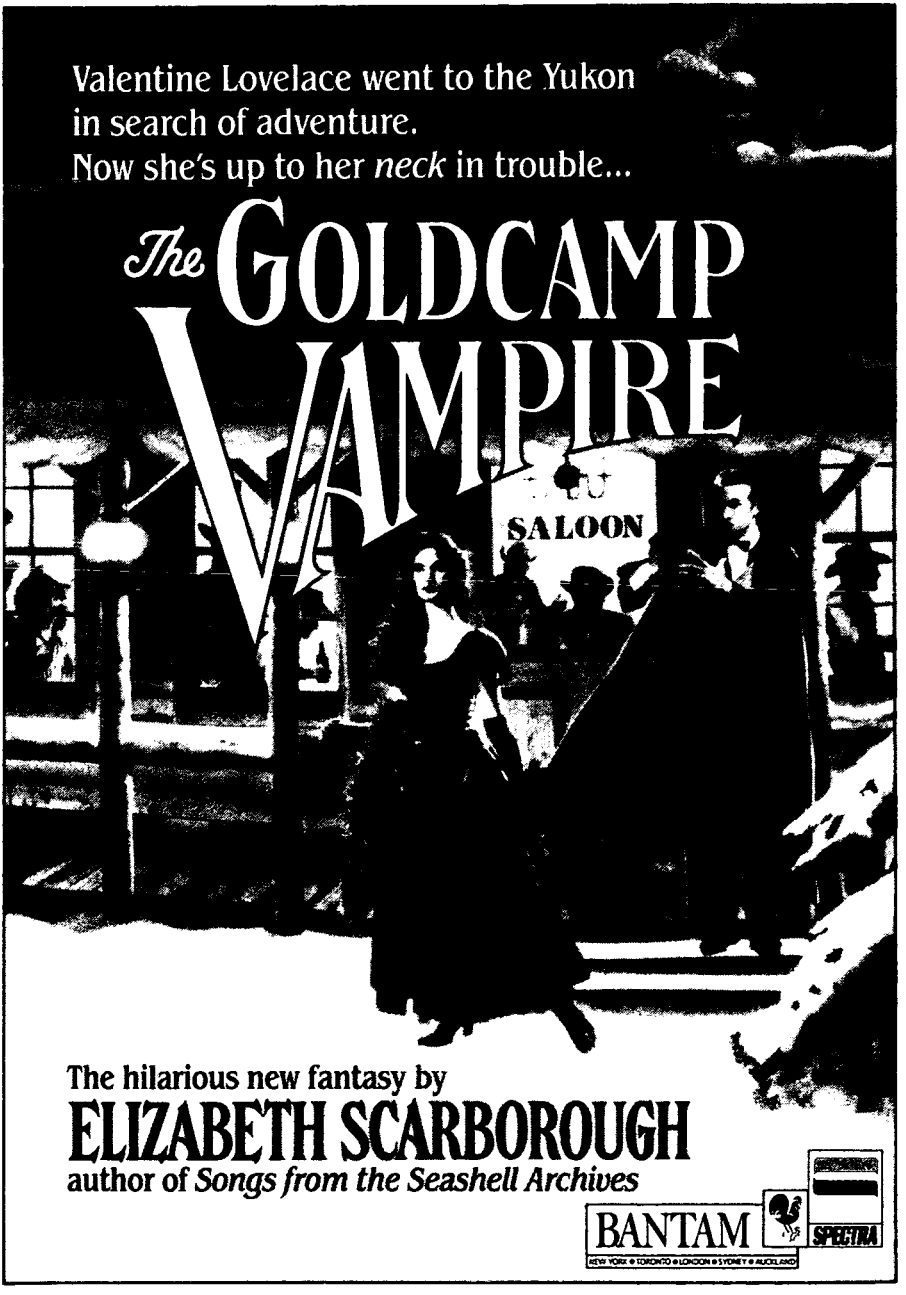
Footsteps behind me. Startled, I turned and saw what looked to be a disembodied white shirt floating toward me. I came to one knee, convinced for the moment that some other ghost had been lured to the machine; but a second later a complete figure emerged from the dark: Tuu. Without a word, he sat cross-legged beside me. He was smoking a cigarette . . . or so I thought until I caught a whiff of marijuana. He took a deep drag, the coal illuminating his placid features, and offered me the joint. I hesitated, not wanting to be pals; but tempted by the smell, I accepted it, biting back a smartass remark about Marxist permissiveness. It was good shit. I could feel the smoke twisting through me, finding out all my hollow places. I handed it back, but he made a gesture of warding it off and after a brief silence, he said, "What do you think about all this, Mr. Puleo?"

"About Stoner?"

"Yes."

"I think"—I jetted smoke from my nostrils—"it's crap that you've got him penned up in that astral tiger cage."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


Valentine Lovelace went to the Yukon
in search of adventure.
Now she's up to her *neck* in trouble...
The GOLDCAMP VAMPIRE
SALOON
The hilarious new fantasy by
ELIZABETH SCARBOROUGH
author of *Songs from the Seashell Archives*
BANTAM
SPECTRA
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Had this discovery been made in the United States," he said, "the circumstances would be no different. Humane considerations—if, indeed, they apply—would have low priority."

"Maybe," I said. "It's still crap."

"Why? Do you believe Stoner is unhappy?"

"Don't you?" I had another hit. It was *very* good shit. The ground seemed to have a pulse. "Ghosts are by nature unhappy."

"Then you know what a ghost is?"

"Not hardly. But I figure unhappy's part of it." The roach was getting too hot; I took a final hit and flipped it away. "How 'bout you? You believe that garbage you preached this mornin'?"

His laugh was soft and cultivated. "That was a press release. However, my actual opinion is neither less absurd-sounding nor more verifiable."

"And what's that?"

He plucked a blade of grass, twiddled it. "I believe a ghost is a quality that dies in a man long before he experiences physical death. Something that has grown acclimated to death and thus survives the body. It might be love or an ambition. An element of character . . . Anything." He regarded me with his lips pursed. "I have such a ghost within me. As do you, Mr. Puleo. My ghost senses yours."

The theory was as harebrained as his others, but I wasn't able to deny it. I knew he was partly right, that a moral filament had snapped inside me during the war and since that time I had lacked the ingredient necessary to the development of a generous soul. Now it seemed that I could feel that lack as a restless presence straining against my flesh. The sawing of the crickets intensified, and I had a rush of paranoia, wondering if Tuu was fucking with my head. Then, moods shifting at the chemical mercies of the dope, my paranoia eroded and Tuu snapped into focus for me . . . or at least his ghost did. He had, I recalled, written poetry prior to the war, and I thought I saw the features of that lost poet melting up from his face: a dreamy fellow given to watching petals fall and contemplating the moon's reflection. I closed my eyes, trying to get a grip. This was the best dope I'd ever smoked. Commie Pink, pure buds of the revolution.

"Are you worried about tomorrow?" Tuu asked.

"Should I be?"

"I can only tell you what I did before—no one has been harmed."

"What happened during those other experiments?" I asked.

"Very little, really. Stoner approached each subject, spoke to them. Then he lost interest and wandered off."

"Spoke to them? Could they hear him?"

"Faintly. However, considering his reaction to you, I wouldn't be surprised if you could hear him quite well."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wasn't thrilled by that prospect. Having to look at Stoner was bad enough. I thought about the eerie shit he might say: admonitory pronouncements, sad questions, windy vowels gusting from his strange depths. Tuu said something and had to repeat it to snap me out of my reverie. He asked how it felt to be back in Vietnam, and without forethought, I said it wasn't a problem.

"And the first time you were here," he said, an edge to his voice. "Was that a problem?"

"What are you gettin' at?"

"I noticed in your records that you were awarded a Silver Star."

"Yeah?"

"You must have been a good soldier. I wondered if you might not have found a calling in war."

"If you're askin' what I think about the war," I said, getting pissed, "I don't make judgments about it. It was a torment for me, nothing more. Its geopolitical consequences, cultural effects, they're irrelevant to me . . . maybe they're ultimately irrelevant. Though I doubt you'd agree."

"We may agree more than you suspect." He sighed pensively. "For both of us, apparently, the war was a passion. In your case, an agonizing one. In mine, while there was also agony, it was essentially a love affair with revolution, with the idea of revolution. And as with all great passions, what was most alluring was not the object of passion but the new depth of my own feelings. Thus I was blind to the realities underlying it. Now"—he waved at the sky, the trees—"now I inhabit those realities and I am not as much in love as once I was. Yet no matter how extreme my disillusionment, the passion continues. I want it to continue. I need the significance with which it imbues my past actions." He studied me. "Isn't that how it is for you? You say war was a torment, but don't you find those days empowering?"

Just as when he had offered me the joint, I realized that I didn't want this sort of peaceful intimacy with him; I preferred him to be my inscrutable enemy. Maybe he was right, maybe—like him—I needed this passion to continue in order to give significance to my past. Whatever, I felt vulnerable to him, to my perception of his humanity. "Good-night," I said, getting to my feet. My ass was numb from sitting and soaked with dew.

He gazed up at me, unreadable, and fingered something from his shirt pocket. Another joint. He lit up, exhaling a billow of smoke. "Good-night," he said coldly.

The next morning—sunny, cloudless—I staked myself out on the red dirt of Cam Le to wait for Stoner. Nervous, I paced back and forth until

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the air began to ripple and he materialized less than thirty feet away. He walked slowly toward me, his rifle dangling; a drop of sweat carved a cold groove across my rib cage. "Puleo," he said, and this time I heard him. His voice was faint, but it shook me.

Looking into his blown-out pupils, I was reminded of a day not long before he had died. We had been hunkered down together after a firefight, and our eyes had met, had locked as if sealed by a vacuum: like two senile old men, incapable of any communication aside from a recognition of the other's vacancy. As I remembered this, it hit home to me that though he hadn't been a friend, he *was* my brother-in-arms, and that as such, I owed him more than journalistic interest.

"Stoner!" I hadn't intended to shout, but in that outcry was a wealth of repressed emotion, of regret and guilt and anguish at not being able to help him elude the fate by which he had been overtaken.

He stopped short; for an instant the hopelessness drained from his face. His image was undergoing that uncanny sharpening of focus: sweat beads popping from his brow, a scab appearing on his chin. The lines of strain around his mouth and eyes were etched deep, filled in with grime, like cracks in his tan.

Tides of emotion were washing over me, and irrational though it seemed, I knew that some of these emotions—the fierce hunger for life in particular—were Stoner's. I believe we had made some sort of connection, and all our thoughts were in flux between us. He moved toward me again. My hands trembled, my knees buckled, and I had to sit down, overwhelmed not by fear but by the combination of his familiarity and utter strangeness. "Jesus, Stoner," I said. "Jesus."

He stood gazing dully down at me. "My sending," he said, his voice louder and with a pronounced resonance. "Did you get it?"

A chill articulated my spine, but I forced myself to ignore it. "Sending?" I said.

"Yesterday," he said, "I sent you what I was feeling. What it's like for me here."

"How?" I asked, recalling the feeling of emptiness. "How'd you do that?"

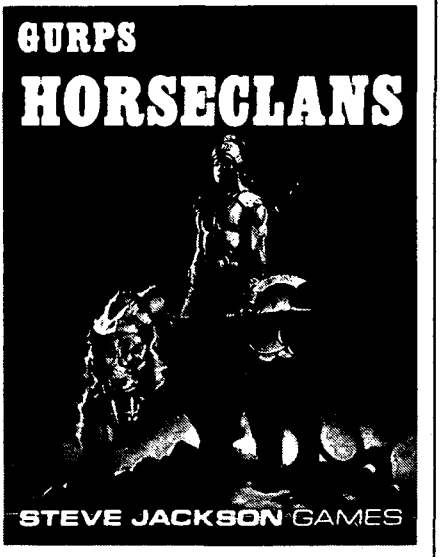
"It's easy, Puleo," he said. "All you have to do is die, and thoughts . . . dreams, they'll flake off you like old paint. But believe me, it's hardly adequate compensation." He sat beside me, resting the rifle across his knees. This was no ordinary sequence of movements. His outline wavered, and his limbs appeared to drift apart: I might have been watching the collapse of a lifelike statue through a volume of disturbed water. It took all my self-control to keep from flinging myself away. His image steadied, and he stared at me. "Last person I was this close to ran like hell," he said. "You always were a tough motherfucker, Puleo. I used to envy you that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They ride the plains of a post-holocaust America, telepathic prairiecats by their sides. They're deadly warriors — for honor, for loot, or just for the joy of a good fight. They would follow their leader, the undying Milo Morai, straight to Hell. And they'd come back with trophies.

They're the

Horseclans



Now, Robert Adams' best-selling *Horseclans* series comes alive in the newest supplement to the *Generic Universal RolePlaying System*. This 96-page book is a complete concordance of all published *Horseclans* material, with maps, historical and geographical information, lists of names, and everything else you need for a complete *Horseclans* roleplaying campaign.

Also included are rules for Undying characters, "mindspeak" and other psi abilities, and a quick system for resolving *large* battles and determining their effects on player characters.

Ask your retailer for this and other great *GURPS* books. *GURPS Horseclans* is $9.95. It is a supplement to the *GURPS Basic Set* — you need both in order to play. The *GURPS Basic Set* is $24.95.

If your local store doesn't have our products, send $10.50 for *GURPS Horseclans* and $27.50 for the *GURPS Basic Set* to order by mail (postpaid). Texas residents please add sales tax (74¢ for *GURPS Horseclans*, $1.95 for *GURPS Basic Set*). Send a SASE for our free catalog.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES
Box 18957-J Austin, TX 78760

GURPS is a registered trademark of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated.
Horseclans is a trademark of Robert Adams. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If I hadn't believed before that he was Stoner, the way he spoke the word "motherfucker" would have cinched it for me: it had the stiffness of a practiced vernacular, a mode of expression that he hadn't mastered. This and his pathetic manner made him seem less menacing. "You were tough, too," I said glibly.

"I tried to be," he said. "I tried to copy you guys. But it was an act, a veneer. And when we hit Cam Le, the veneer cracked."

"You remember . . . " I broke off because it didn't feel right, my asking him questions; the idea of translating his blood and bones into a best-seller was no longer acceptable.

"Dying?" His lips thinned. "Oh, yeah. Every detail. You guys were hassling the villagers, and I thought, Christ, they're going to kill them. I didn't want to be involved, and . . . I was so tired, you know, so tired in my head, and I figured if I walked off a little ways, I wouldn't be part of it. I'd be innocent. So I did. I moved a ways off, and the wails, the shouts, they weren't real anymore. Then I came to this hut. I'd lost track of what was happening by that time. In my mind I was sure you'd already started shooting, and I said to myself, I'll show them I'm doing my bit, put a few rounds into this hut. Maybe"—his Adam's apple worked—"maybe they'll think I killed somebody. Maybe that'll satisfy them."

I looked down at the dirt, troubled by what I now understood to be my complicity in his death, and troubled also by a new understanding of the events surrounding the death. I realized that if anyone else had gotten himself blown up, the rest of us would have flipped out and likely have wasted the villagers. But since it had been Stoner, the explosion had had almost a calming effect: Cam Le had rid us of a nuisance.

Stoner reached out his hand to me. I was too mesmerized by the gesture, which left afterimages in the air, to recoil from it, and I watched horrified as his fingers gripped my upper arm, pressing wrinkles in my shirtsleeve. His touch was light and transmitted a dry coolness, and with it came a sensation of weakness. By all appearances, it was a normal hand, yet I kept expecting it to become translucent and merge with my flesh.

"It's going to be okay," said Stoner.

His tone, though bemused, was confident, and I thought I detected a change in his face, but I couldn't put my finger on what the change was. "Why's it gonna be okay?" I asked, my voice more frail and ghostly-sounding than his. "It doesn't seem okay to me."

"Because you're part of my process, my circuitry. Understand?"

"No," I said. I had identified what had changed about him. Whereas a few moments before he had looked real, now he looked more than real, ultra-real; his features had acquired the kind of gloss found in airbrushed photographs, and for a split second his eyes were cored with points of glitter as if reflecting a camera flash . . . except these points were bluish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

white not red. There was a coarseness to his face that hadn't been previously evident, and in contrast to my earlier perception of him, he now struck me as dangerous, malevolent.

He squinted and cocked his head. "What's wrong, man? You scared of me?" He gave an amused sniff. "Hang in there, Puleo. Tough guy like you, you'll make an adjustment." My feeling of weakness had intensified: it was as if blood or some even more vital essence were trickling out of me. "Come on, Puleo," he said mockingly. "Ask me some questions. That's what you're here for, isn't it? I mean this must be the goddamn scoop of the century. Good News From Beyond the Grave! Of course"—he pitched his voice low and sepulchral—"The news isn't all that good."

Those glittering cores resurfaced in his pupils, and I wanted to wrench free; but I felt helpless, wholly in his thrall.

"You see," he went on, "when I appeared in the village, when I walked around and"—he chuckled—"haunted the place, those times were like sleepwalking. I barely knew what was happening. But the rest of the time, I was somewhere else. Somewhere really fucking weird."

My weakness was bordering on vertigo, but I mustered my strength and croaked, "Where?"

"The Land of Shades," he said. "That's what I call it, anyway. You wouldn't like it, Puleo. It wouldn't fit your idea of order."

The lights burned in his eyes, winking bright, and—as if in correspondence to their brightness—my dizziness increased. "Tell me about it," I said, trying to take my mind off the discomfort.

"I'd be delighted!" He grinned nastily. "But not now. It's too complicated. Tonight, man. I'll send you a dream tonight. A bad dream. That'll satisfy your curiosity."

My head was spinning, my stomach abubble with nausea. "Lemme go, Stoner," I said.

"Isn't this good for you, man? It's very good for me." With a flick of his hand, he released my wrist.

I braced myself to keep from falling over, drew a deep breath and gradually my strength returned. Stoner's eyes continued to burn, and his features maintained their coarsened appearance. The difference between the way he looked now and the lost soul I had first seen was like that between night and day, and I began to wonder whether or not his touching me and my resultant weakness had anything to do with the transformation. "Part of your process," I said. "Does that . . . "

He looked me straight in the eyes, and I had the impression he was cautioning me to silence. It was more than a caution: a wordless command, a sending. "Let me explain something," he said. "A ghost is merely a stage of growth. He walks because he grows strong by walking. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more he walks, the less he's bound to the world. When he's strong enough"—he made a planing gesture with his hand—"he goes away."

He seemed to be expecting a response. "Where's he go?" I asked.

"Where he belongs," he said. "And if he's prevented from walking, from growing strong, he's doomed."

"You mean he'll die?"

"Or worse."

"And there's no other way out for him?"

"No."

He was lying—I was sure of it. Somehow I posed for him a way out of Cam Le. "Well . . . so," I said, flustered, uncertain of what to do and at the same time pleased with the prospect of conspiring against Tuu.

"Just sit with me a while," he said, easing his left foot forward to touch my right ankle.

Once again I experienced weakness, and over the next seven or eight hours, he would alternately move his foot away, allowing me to recover, and then bring it back into contact with me. I'm not certain what was happening. One logic dictates that since I had been peripherally involved in his death—"part of his process"—he was therefore able to draw strength from me. Likely as not, this was the case. Yet I've never been convinced that ordinary logic applied to our circumstance: it may be that we were governed by an arcane rationality to which we both were blind. Though his outward aspect did not appear to undergo further changes, his strength became tangible, a cold radiation that pulsed with the steadiness of an icy heart. I came to feel that the image I was seeing was the tip of an iceberg, the perceptible extremity of a huge power cell that existed mainly in dimensions beyond the range of mortal vision. I tried to give the impression of an interview to our observers by continuing to ask questions; but Stoner sat with his head down, his face hidden, and gave terse, disinterested replies.

The sun declined to the tops of the palms, the yellow paint of the houses took on a tawny hue, and—drained by the day-long alternation of weakness and recovery—I told Stoner I needed to rest. "Tomorrow," he said without looking up. "Come back tomorrow."

"All right." I had no doubt that Tuu would be eager to go on with the experiment. I stood and turned to leave; but then another question, a pertinent one, occurred to me. "If a ghost is a stage of growth," I said, "what's he grow into?"

He lifted his head, and I staggered back, terrified. His eyes were ablaze, even the whites winking with cold fire, as if nuggets of phosphorus were embedded in his skull.

"Tomorrow," he said again.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

During the debriefing that followed, I developed a bad case of the shakes and experienced a number of other, equally unpleasant reactions; the places where Stoner had touched me seemed to have retained a chill, and the thought of that dead hand leeching me of energy was in retrospect thoroughly repellent. A good many of Tuu's subordinates, alarmed by Stoner's transformation, lobbied to break off the experiement. I did my best to soothe them, but I wasn't at all sure I wanted to return to the village. I couldn't tell whether Tuu noticed either my trepidation or the fact that I was being less than candid; he was too busy bringing his subordinates in line to question me in depth.

That night, when Fierman broke out his whiskey, I swilled it down as if it were an antidote to poison. To put it bluntly, I got shit-faced. Both Fierman and Witcover seemed warm human beings, old buddies, and our filthy yellow room with its flickering lamp took on the coziness of a cottage and hearth. The first stage of my drunk was maudlin, filled with self-recriminations over my past treatment of Stoner: I vowed not to shrink from helping him. The second stage . . . Well, once I caught Fierman gazing at me askance and registered that my behavior was verging on the manic. Laughing hysterically, talking like a speed freak. We talked about everything except Stoner, and I suppose it was inevitable that the conversation work itself around to the war and its aftermath. Dimly, I heard myself pontificating on a variety of related subjects. At one point Fierman asked what I thought of the Vietnam Memorial, and I told him I had mixed emotions.

"Why?" he asked.

"I go to the Memorial, man," I said, standing up from the table where we had all been sitting. "And I cry. You can't help but cryin', 'cause that"—I hunted for an appropriate image—"that black dividin' line between nowheres, that says it just right 'bout the war. It feels good to cry, to go public with grief and take your place with all the vets of the truly outstandin' wars." I swayed, righted myself. "But the Memorial, the Unknown, the parades . . . basically they're bullshit." I started to wander around the room, realized that I had forgotten why I had stood and leaned against the wall.

"How you mean?" asked Witcover, who was nearly as drunk as I was.

"Man," I said, "it's a shuck! I mean ten goddamn years go by, and alla sudden there's this blast of media warmth and government-sponsored emotion. 'Welcome home, guys,' ever'body's sayin'. 'We're sorry we treated you so bad. Next time it's gonna be different. You wait and see.' " I went back to the table and braced myself on it with both hands, staring blearily at Witcover: his tan looked blotchy. "Hear that, man? 'Next time.' That's all it is. Nobody really gives a shit 'bout the vets. They're just pavin' the way for the next time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I don't know," said Witcover. "Seems to—"

"Right!" I spanked the table with the flat of my hand. "You don't know. You don't know shit 'bout it, so shut the fuck up!"

"Be cool," advised Fierman. "Man's entitled to his 'pinion."

I looked at him, saw a flushed, fat face with bloodshot eyes and a stupid reproving frown. "Fuck you," I said. "And fuck his 'pinion." I turned back to Witcover. "Whaddya think, man? That there's this genuine breath of conscience sweepin' the land? Open your goddamn eyes! You been to the movies lately? Jesus Christ! Courageous grunts strikin' fear into the heart of the Red Menace! Miraculous one-man missions to save our honor. Huh! Honor!" I took a long pull from the bottle. "Those movies, they make war seem like a mystical opportunity. Well, man, when I was here it wasn't quite that way, y'know. It was leeches, fungus, the shits. It was searchin' in the weeds for your buddy's arm. It was lookin' into the snaky eyes of some whore you were bangin' and feelin' weird shit crawl along your spine and expectin' her head to do a Linda Blair three-sixty spin." I slumped into a chair and leaned close to Witcover. "It was Mordor, man. Stephen King land. Horror. And now, now I look around at all these movies and monuments and crap, and it makes me wanna fuckin' puke to see what a noble hell it's turnin' out to be!"

I felt pleased with myself, having said this, and I leaned back, basking in a righteous glow. But Witcover was unimpressed. His face cinched into a scowl, and he said in a tight voice, "You're startin' to really piss me off, y'know."

"Yeah?" I said, and grinned. "How 'bout that?"

"Yeah, all you war-torn creeps, you think you got papers sayin' you can make an ass outta yourself and everybody else gotta say, 'Oh, you poor fucker! Give us more of your tortured wisdom!' "

Fierman muffled a laugh, and—rankled—I said, "That so?"

Witcover hunched his shoulders as if preparing for an off-tackle plunge. "I been listenin' to you guys for years, and you're alla goddamn same. You think you're owed something 'cause you got ground around in the political mill. Shit! I been in Salvador, Nicaragua, Afghanistan. Compared to those people, you didn't go through diddley. But you use what happened as an excuse for fuckin' up your lives . . . or for being assholes. Like you, man." He affected a macho-sounding bass voice. " 'I been in a war. I am an expert on reality.' You don't know how ridiculous you are."

"Am I?" I was shaking again, but with adrenaline not fear, and I knew I was going to hit Witcover. He didn't know it—he was smirking, his eyes flicking toward Fierman, seeking approval—and that in itself was a sufficient reason to hit him, purely for educational purposes: I had, you see, reached the level of drunkenness at which an amoral man such as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

myself understands his whimsies to be moral imperatives. But the real reason, the one that had begun to rumble inside me, was Stoner. All my fear, all my reactions thus far, had merely been tremors signaling an imminent explosion, and now, thinking about him nearby, old horrors were stirred up, and I saw myself walking in a napalmed village rife with dead VC, crispy critters, and beside me this weird little guy named Fellowes who claimed he could read the future from their scorched remains and would point at a hexagramlike structure of charred bone and gristle and say, "That there means a bad moon on Wednesday," and claimed, too, that he could read the past from the blood of head wounds, and then I was leaning over this Canadian nurse, beautiful blond girl, disemboweled by a mine and somehow still alive, her organs dark and wet and pulsing, and somebody giggling, whispering about what he'd like to do, and then another scene that was whirled away so quickly, I could only make out the color of blood, and Witcover said something else, and a dead man was stretching out his hand to me and . . .

I nailed Witcover, and he flew sideways off the chair and rolled on the floor. I got to my feet, and Fierman grabbed me, trying to wrangle me away; but that was unnecessary, because all my craziness had been dissipated. "I'm okay now," I said, slurring the words, pushing him aside. He threw a looping punch that glanced off my neck, not even staggering me. Then Witcover yelled. He had pulled himself erect and was weaving toward me; an egg-shaped lump was swelling on his cheekbone. I laughed—he looked so puffed up with rage—and started for the door. As I went through it, he hit me on the back of the head. The blow stunned me a bit, but I was more amused than hurt; his fist had made a funny *bonk* sound on my skull, and that set me to laughing harder.

I stumbled between the houses, bouncing off walls, reeling out of control, and heard shouts . . . Vietnamese shouts. By the time I had regained my balance, I had reached the center of the village. The moon was almost full, pale yellow, its craters showing: a pitted eye in the black air. It kept shrinking and expanding, and—as it seemed to lurch farther off—I realized I had fallen and was lying flat on my back. More shouts. They sounded distant, a world away, and the moon had begun to spiral, to dwindle, like water being sucked down a drain. Jesus, I remember thinking just before I passed out, Jesus, how'd I get so drunk?

I'd forgotten Stoner's promise to tell me about the Land of Shades, but apparently he had not, for that night I had a dream in which I was Stoner. It was not that I thought I was him: I *was* him, prone to all his twitches, all his moods. I was walking in a pitch-dark void, possessed by a great hunger. Once this hunger might have been characterized as a yearning for the life I had lost, but it had been transformed into a lust

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the life I might someday attain if I proved equal to the tests with which I was presented. That was all I knew of the Land of Shades—that it was a testing ground, less a place than a sequence of events. It was up to me to gain strength from the tests, to ease my hunger as best I could. I was ruled by this hunger, and it was my only wish to ease it.

Soon I spotted an island of brightness floating in the dark, and as I drew near, the brightness resolved into an old French planatation house fronted by tamarinds and rubber trees; sections of white stucco wall and a verandah and a red tile roof were visible between the trunks. Patterns of soft radiance overlaid the grounds, yet there were neither stars nor moon nor any source of light I could discern. I was not alarmed by this—such discrepancies were typical of the Land of Shades.

When I reached the trees, I paused, steeling myself for whatever lay ahead. Breezes sprang up to stir the leaves, and a sizzling chorus of crickets faded in from nowhere as if a recording of sensory detail had been switched on. Alert to every shift of shadow, I moved cautiously through the trees and up the verandah steps. Broken roof tiles crunched beneath my feet. Beside the door stood a bottom-out cane chair; the rooms, however, were devoid of furnishings, the floors dusty, the white-wash flaking from the walls. The house appeared to be deserted, but I knew I was not alone. There was a hush in the air, the sort that arises from a secretive presence. Even had I failed to notice this, I could scarcely have missed the scent of perfume. I had never tested against a woman before, and, excited by the prospect, I was tempted to run through the house and ferret her out. But this would have been foolhardy, and I continued at a measured pace.

At the center of the house lay a courtyard, a rectangular space choked with waist-high growths of jungle plants, dominated by a stone fountain in the shape of a stylized orchid. The woman was leaning against the fourtain, and despite the grayish-green half-light—a light that seemed to arise from the plants—I could see she was beautiful. Slim and honey-colored, with falls of black hair spilling over the shoulders of her *ao dai*. She did not move or speak, but the casualness of her pose was an invitation. I felt drawn to her, and as I pushed through the foliage, the fleshy leaves clung to my thighs and groin, touches that seemed designed to provoke arousal. I stopped an arm's length away and studied her. Her features were of a feline delicacy, and in the fullness of her lower lip, the petulant set of her mouth, I detected a trace of French breeding. She stared at me with palpable sexual interest. It had not occurred to me that the confrontation might take place on a sexual level, yet now I was certain this would be the case. I had to restrain myself from initiating the contact: there are rigorous formalities that must be observed prior to each test. And besides, I wanted to savor the experience.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I am Tuyet," she said in a voice that seemed to combine the qualities of smoke and music.

"Stoner," I said.

The names hung in the air like the echoes of two gongs.

She lifted her hand as if to touch me, but lowered it: she, too, was practicing restraint. "I was a prostitute," she said. "My home was Lai Khe, but I was an outcast. I worked the water points along Highway Thirteen."

It was conceivable, I thought, that I may have known her. While I had been laid up in An Loc, I'd frequented those water points: bomb craters that had been turned into miniature lakes by the rains and served as filling stations for the water trucks attached to the First Infantry. Every morning the whores and their mama sans would drive out to the water points in three-wheeled motorcycle trucks; with them would be vendors selling combs and pushbutton knives and rubbers that came wrapped in gold foil, making them look like those disks of chocolate you can buy in the States. Most of these girls were more friendly than the city girls, and knowing that Tuyet had been one of them caused me to feel an affinity with her.

She went on to tell me that she had gone into the jungle with an American soldier and had been killed by a sniper. I told her my story in brief and then asked what she had learned of the Land of Shades. This is the most rigorous formality: I had never met anyone with whom I had failed to exchange information.

"Once," Tuyet said, "I met an old man, a Cao Dai medium from Black Virgin Mountain, who told me he had been to a place where a pillar of whirling light and dust joined earth to sky. Voices spoke from the pillar, sometimes many at once, and from them he understood that all wars are merely reflections of a deeper struggle, of a demon breaking free. The demon freed by our war, he said, was very strong, very dangerous. We the dead had been recruited to wage war against him."

I had been told a similar story by an NLF captain, and once, while crawling through a tunnel system, I myself had heard voices speaking from a skull half buried in the earth. But I had been too frightened to stay and listen. I related all this to Tuyet, and her response was to trail her fingers across my arm. My restraint, too, had frayed. I dragged her down into the thick foliage. It was as if we had been submerged in a sea of green light and fleshy stalks, as if the plantation house had vanished and we were adrift in an infinite vegetable depth where gravity had been replaced by some buoyant principle. I tore at her clothes, she at mine. Her *ao dai* shredded like crepe, and my fatigues came away in ribbons that dangled from her hooked fingers. Greedy for her, I pressed my mouth to her breasts. Her nipples looked black in contrast to her skin, and it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed I could taste their blackness, tart and sour. Our breathing was hoarse, urgent, and the only other sound was the soft mulching of the leaves. With surprising strength, she pushed me onto my back and straddled my hips, guiding me inside her, sinking down until her buttocks were grinding against my thighs.

Her head flung back, she lifted and lowered herself. The leaves and stalks churned and intertwined around us as if they, too, were copulating. For a few moments my hunger was assuaged, but soon I noticed that the harder I thrust, the more fiercely she plunged, the less intense the sensations became. Though she gripped me tightly, the friction seemed to have been reduced. Frustrated, I dug my fingers into her plump hips and battered at her, trying to drive myself deeper. Then I squeezed one of her breasts and felt a searing pain in my palm. I snatched back my hand and saw that her nipple, both nipples, were twisting, elongating; I realized that they had been transformed into the heads of two black centipedes, and the artful movements of her internal muscles . . . they were too artful, too disconnectedly in motion. An instant later I felt that same searing pain in my cock and knew I was screwing myself into a nest of creatures like those protruding from her breasts. All her skin was rippling, reflecting the humping of thousands of centipedes beneath.

The pain was enormous, so much so that I thought my entire body must be glowing with it. But I did not dare fail this test, and I continued pumping into her, thrusting harder than ever. The leaves thrashed, the stalks thrashed as in a gale, and the green light grew livid. Tuyet began to scream—God knows what manner of pain I was causing her—and her screams completed a perverse circuit within me. I found I could channel my own pain into those shrill sounds. Still joined to her, I rolled atop her, clamped her wrists together and pinned them above her head. Her screams rang louder, inspiring me to greater efforts yet. Despite the centipedes tipping her breasts, or perhaps because of them, because of the grotesque juxtaposition of the sensual and the horrid, her beauty seemed to have been enhanced, and my mastery over her actually provided me a modicum of pleasure.

The light began to whiten, and looking off, I saw that we were being borne by an invisible current through—as I had imagined—an infinite depth of stalks and leaves. The stalks that lashed around us thickened far below into huge pale trunks with circular ribbing. I could not make out where they met the earth—if, indeed, they did—and they appeared to rise an equal height above. The light brightened further, casting the distant stalks in silhouette, and I realized we were drifting toward the source of the whiteness, beyond which would lie another test, another confrontation. I glanced at Tuyet. Her skin no longer displayed that obscene rippling, her nipples had reverted to normal. Pain was evolving

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into pleasure, but I knew it would be short-lived, and I tried to resist the current, to hold onto pain, because even pain was preferable to the hunger I would soon experience. Tuyet clawed my back, and I felt the first dissolute rush of my orgasm. The current was irresistible. It flowed through my blood, my cells. It was part of me, or rather I was part of it. I let it move me, bringing me to completion.

Gradually the whipping of the stalks subsided to a pliant swaying motion. They parted for us, and we drifted through their interstices as serenely as a barge carved to resemble a coupling of two naked figures. I found I could not disengage from Tuyet, that the current enforced our union, and resigned to this, I gazed around, marveling at the vastness of this vegetable labyrinth and the strangeness of our fates. Beams of white light shined through the stalks, the brightness growing so profound that I thought I heard in it a roaring; and as my consciousness frayed, I saw myself reflected in Tuyet's eyes—a ragged dark creature wholly unlike my own self-image—and wondered for the thousandth time who had placed us in this world, who had placed these worlds in us.

Other dreams followed, but they were ordinary, the dreams of an ordinarily anxious, ordinarily drunken man, and it was the memory of this first dream that dominated my waking moments. I didn't want to wake because—along with a headache and other symptoms of hangover—I felt incredibly weak, incapable of standing and facing the world. Muzzy-headed, I ignored the reddish light prying under my eyelids and tried to remember more of the dream. Despite Stoner's attempts to appear streetwise, despite the changes I had observed in him, he had been at heart an innocent and it was difficult to accept that the oddly formal, brutally sexual protagonist of the dream had been in any way akin to him. Maybe, I thought, recalling Tuu's theory of ghosts, maybe that was the quality that had died in Stoner: his innocence. I began once again to suffer guilt feelings over my hatred of him, and, preferring a hangover to that, I propped myself on one elbow and opened my eyes.

I doubt more than a second or two passed before I sprang to my feet, hangover forgotten, electrified with fear; but in that brief span the reason for my weakness was made plain. Stoner was sitting close to where I had been lying, his hand outstretched to touch me, head down . . . exactly as he had sat the previous day. Aside from his pose, however, very little about him was the same.

The scene was of such complexity that now, thinking back on it, it strikes me as implausible that I could have noticed its every detail; yet I suppose that its power was equal to its complexity and thus I did not so much see it as it was imprinted on my eyes. Dawn was a crimson smear fanning across the lower sky, and the palms stood out blackly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against it, their fronds twitching in the breeze like spiders impaled on pins. The ruddy light gave the rutted dirt of the street the look of a trough full of congealed blood. Stoner was motionless—that is to say, he didn't move his limbs, his head, or shift his position; but his image was pulsing, swelling to half again its normal size and then deflating, all with the rhythm of steady breathing. As he expanded, the cold white fire blazing from his eyes would spread in cracks that veined his entire form; as he contracted, the cracks would disappear and for a moment he would be—except for his eyes—the familiar figure I had known. It seemed that his outward appearance—his fatigues and helmet, his skin—was a shell from which some glowing inner man was attempting to break free. Grains of dust were whirling up from the ground beside him, more and more all the time: a miniature cyclone wherein he sat calm and ultimately distracted, the likeness of a warrior monk whose meditations had borne fruit.

Shouts behind me. I turned and saw Fierman, Tuu, Witcover, and various of the gooks standing at the edge of the village. Tuu beckoned to me, and I wanted to comply, to run, but I wasn't sure I had the strength. And, too, I didn't think Stoner would let me. His power surged around me, a cold windy voltage that whipped my clothes and set static charges crackling in my hair. "Turn it off!" I shouted, pointing at the tin-roofed building. They shook their heads, shouting in return. ". . . can't," I heard, and something about ". . . feedback."

Then Stoner spoke. "Puleo," he said. His voice wasn't loud but it was all-encompassing. I seemed to be inside it, balanced on a tongue of red dirt, within a throat of sky and jungle and yellow stone. I turned back to him. Looked into his eyes . . . fell into them, into a world of cold brilliance where a thousand fiery forms were materialized and dispersed every second, forms both of such beauty and hideousness that their effect on me, their beholder, was identical, a confusion of terror and exaltation. Whatever they were, the forms of Stoner's spirit, his potentials, or even of his thoughts, they were in their momentary life more vital and consequential than I could ever hope to be. Compelled by them, I walked over to him. I must have been afraid—I could feel wetness on my thighs and realized that my bladder had emptied—but he so dominated me that I knew only the need to obey. He did not stand, yet with each expansion his image would loom up before my eyes and I would stare into that dead face seamed by rivulets of molten diamond, its expression losing coherence, features splitting apart. Then he would shrink, leaving me gazing dumbly down at the top of his helmet. Dust stung my eyelids, my cheeks.

"What . . . " I began, intending to ask what he wanted; but before I could finish, he seized my wrist. Ice flowed up my arm, shocking my heart, and I heard myself . . . not screaming. No, this was the sound life

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

makes leaving the body, like the squealing of gas released from a balloon that's half pinched shut.

Within seconds, drained of strength, I slumped to the ground, my vision reduced to a darkening fog. If he had maintained his hold much longer, I'm sure I would have died . . . and I was resigned to the idea. I had no weapon with which to fight him. But then I realized that the cold had receded from my limbs. Dazed, I looked around, and when I spotted him, I tried to stand, to run. Neither my arms nor legs would support me, and—desperate—I flopped on the red dirt, trying to crawl to safety; but after that initial burst of panic, the gland that governed my reactions must have overloaded, because I stopped crawling, rolled onto my back and stayed put, feeling stunned, weak, transfixed by what I saw. Yet not in the least afraid.

Stoner's inner man, now twice human-size, had broken free and was standing at the center of the village, some twenty feet off: a bipedal silhouette through which it seemed you could look forever into a dimension of fire and crystal, like a hole burned in the fabric of the world. His movements were slow, tentative, as if he hadn't quite adapted to his new form, and penetrating him, arcing through the air from the tin-roofed building, their substance flowing toward him, were what appeared to be thousands of translucent wires, the structures of the fields. As I watched, they began to glow with Stoner's blue-white-diamond color, their substance to reverse its flow and pour back toward the building, and to emit a bass hum. Dents popped in the tin roof, the walls bulged inward, and with a grinding noise, a narrow fissure forked open in the earth beside it. The glowing wires grew brighter and brighter, and the building started to crumple, never collapsing, but—as if giant hands were pushing at it from every direction—compacting with terrible slowness until it had been squashed to perhaps a quarter of its original height. The hum died away. A fire broke out in the wreckage, pale flames leaping high and winnowing into black smoke.

Somebody clutched my shoulder, hands hauled me to my feet. It was Tuu and one of his soldiers. Their faces were knitted by lines of concern, and that concern rekindled my fear. I clawed at them, full of gratitude, and let them hustle me away. We took our places among the other observers, the smoking building at our backs, all gazing at the yellow houses and the burning giant in their midst.

The air around Stoner had become murky, turbulent, and this turbulence spread to obscure the center of the village. He stood unmoving, while small dust devils kicked up at his heels and went zipping about like a god's zany pets. One of the houses caved in with a *whump,* and pieces of yellow concrete began to lift from the ruins, to float toward Stoner; drawing near him, they acquired some of his brightness, glowing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in their own right, and then vanished into the turbulence. Another house imploded, and the same process was initiated. The fact that all this was happening in dead silence—except for the caving in of the houses—made it seem even more eerie and menacing than if there had been sound.

The turbulence eddied faster and faster, thickening, and at last a strange vista faded in from the dark air, taking its place the way the picture melts up from the screen of an old television set. Four or five minutes must have passed before it became completely clear, and then it seemed sharper and more in focus than did the jungle and the houses, more even than the blazing figure who had summoned it: an acre-sized patch of hell or heaven or something in between, shining through the dilapidated structures and shabby colors of the ordinary, paling them. Beyond Stoner lay a vast forested plain dotted with fires . . . or maybe they weren't fires but some less chaotic form of energy, for though they gave off smoke, the flames maintained rigorous, stylized shapes, showing like red fountains and poinsettias and other shapes yet against the poisonous green of the trees. Smoke hung like a gray pall over the plain, and now and again beams of radiance—all so complexly figured, they appeared to be pillars of crystal—would shoot up from the forest into the grayness and resolve into a burst of light; and at the far limit of the plain, beyond a string of ragged hills, the dark sky would intermittently flash reddish orange as if great batteries of artillery were homing in upon some target there.

I had thought that Stoner would set forth at once into this other world, but instead he backed a step away and I felt despair for him, fear that he wouldn't seize his opportunity to escape. It may seem odd that I still thought of him as Stoner, and it may be that prior to that moment I had forgotten his human past; but now, sensing his trepidation, I understood that what enlivened this awesome figure was some scrap of soul belonging to the man-child I once had known. Silently, I urged him on. Yet he continued to hesitate.

It wasn't until someone tried to pull me back that I realized I was moving toward Stoner. I shook off whomever it was, walked to the edge of the village and called Stoner's name. I didn't really expect him to acknowledge me, and I'm not clear as to what my motivations were: maybe it was just that since I had come this far with him, I didn't want my efforts wasted. But I think it was something more, some old loyalty resurrected, one I had denied while he was alive.

"Get outta here!" I shouted. "Go on! Get out!"

He turned that blind, fiery face toward me, and despite its featurelessness, I could read therein the record of his solitude, his fears concerning its resolution. It was, I knew, a final sending. I sensed again his emptiness, but it wasn't so harrowing and hopeless as before; in it there

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a measure of determination, of purpose, and, too, a kind of . . . I'm tempted to say gratitude, but in truth it was more a simple acknowledgment, like the wave of a hand given by one workman to another after the completion of a difficult task.

"Go." I said it softly, the way you'd speak when urging a child to take his first step, and Stoner walked away.

For a few moments, though his legs moved, he didn't appear to be making any headway; his figure remained undiminished by distance. There was a tension in the air, an almost impalpable disturbance that quickly evolved into a heated pulse. One of the banana trees burst into flames, its leaves shriveling; a second tree ignited, a third, and soon all those trees close to the demarcation of that other world were burning like green ceremonial candles. The heat intensified, and the veils of dust that blew toward me carried a stinging residue of that heat; the sky for hundreds of feet above rippled as with the effects of an immense conflagration.

I stumbled back, tripped and fell heavily. When I recovered I saw that Stoner was receding, that the world into which he was traveling was receding with him, or rather seeming to fold, to bisect and collapse around him: it looked as if that plain dotted with fires were painted on a curtain, and as he pushed forward, the fabric was drawn with him, its painted distances becoming foreshortened, its perspectives exaggerated and surreal, molding into a tunnel that conformed to his shape. His figure shrank to half its previous size, and then—some limit reached, some barrier penetrated—the heat died away, its dissipation accompanied by a seething hiss, and Stoner's white fire began to shine brighter and brighter, his form eroding in brightness. I had to shield my eyes, then shut them; but even so, I could see the soundless explosion that followed through my lids, and for several minutes I could make out its vague afterimage. A blast of wind pressed me flat, hot at first, but blowing colder and colder, setting my teeth to chattering. At last this subsided, and on opening my eyes, I found that Stoner had vanished, and where the plain had been now lay a wreckage of yellow stone and seared banana trees, ringed by a few undamaged houses on the perimeter.

The only sound was the crackle of flames from the tin-roofed building. Moments later, however, I heard a patter of applause. I looked behind me: the gooks were all applauding Tuu, who was smiling and bowing like the author of a successful play. I was shocked at their reaction. How could they be concerned with accolades? Hadn't they been dazzled, as I had, their humanity diminished by the mystery and power of Stoner's metamorphosis? I went over to them, and drawing near, I overheard an officer congratulate Tuu on "another triumph." It took me a while to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

register the significance of those words, and when I did I pushed through the group and confronted Tuu.

" 'Another triumph'?" I said.

He met my eyes, imperturbable. "I wasn't aware you spoke our language, Mr. Puleo."

"You've done this before," I said, getting angry. "Haven't you?"

"Twice before." He tapped a cigarette from a pack of Marlboros; an officer rushed to light it. "But never with an American spirit."

"You coulda killed me!" I shouted, lunging for him. Two soldiers came between us, menacing me with their rifles.

Tuu blew out a plume of smoke that seemed to give visible evidence of his self-satisfaction. "I told you it was a risk," he said. "Does it matter that I knew the extent of the risk and you did not? You were in no greater danger because of that. We were prepared to take steps if the situation warranted."

"Don't bullshit me! You couldn't have done nothin' with Stoner!"

He let a smile nick the corners of his mouth.

"You had no right," I said. "You—"

Tuu's face hardened. "We had no right to mislead you? Please, Mr. Puleo. Between our peoples, deception is a tradition."

I fumed, wanting to get at him. Frustrated, I slugged my thigh with my fist, spun on my heel and walked off. The two soldiers caught up with me and blocked my path. Furious, I swatted at their rifles; they disengaged their safeties and aimed at my stomach.

"If you wish to be alone," Tuu called, "I have no objection to you taking a walk. We have tests to complete. But please keep to the road. A car will come for you."

Before the soldiers could step aside, I pushed past them.

"Keep to the road, Mr. Puleo!" In Tuu's voice was more than a touch of amusement. "If you recall, we're quite adept at tracking."

Anger was good for me; it kept my mind off what I had seen. I wasn't ready to deal with Stoner's evolution. I wanted to consider things in simple terms: a man I had hated had died to the world a second time and I had played a part in his release, a part in which I had no reason to take pride or bear shame, because I had been manipulated every step of the way. I was so full of anger, I must have done the first mile in under fifteen minutes, the next in not much more. By then the sun had risen above the treeline and I had worked up a sweat. Insects buzzed; monkeys screamed. I slowed my pace and turned my head from side to side as I went, as if I were walking point again. I had the idea my own ghost was walking with me, shifting around inside and burning to get out on its own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After an hour or so I came to the temporary housing that had been erected for the populace of Cam Le: thatched huts; scrawny dogs slinking and chickens pecking; orange peels, palm litter, and piles of shit in the streets. Some old men smoking pipes by a cookfire blinked at me. Three girls carrying plastic jugs giggled, ran off behind a hut and peeked back around the corner.

Vietnam.

I thought about the way I'd used to sneer the word. 'Nam, I'd say. Viet-fucking-nam! Now it was spoken proudly, printed in Twentieth Century-Fox monolithic capitals, brazen with hype. Perhaps between those two extremes was a mode of expression that captured the ordinary reality of the place, the poverty and peacefulness of this village; but if so, it wasn't accessible to me.

Some of the villagers were coming out of their doors to have a look at the stranger. I wondered if any of them recognized me. Maybe, I thought, chuckling madly, maybe if I bashed a couple on the head and screamed "Number Ten VC!" maybe then they'd remember.

I suddenly felt tired and empty, and I sat down by the road to wait. I was so distracted, I didn't notice at first that a number of flies had mistaken me for a new and bigger piece of shit and were orbiting me, crawling over my knuckles. I flicked them away, watched them spiral off and land on other parts of my body. I got into controlling their patterns of flight, seeing if I could make them all congregate on my left hand, which I kept still. Weird shudders began passing through my chest, and the vacuum inside my head filled with memories of Stoner, his bizarre dream, his terrible Valhalla. I tried to banish them, but they stuck there, replaying themselves over and over. I couldn't order them, couldn't derive any satisfaction from them. Like the passage of a comet, Stoner's escape from Cam Le had been a trivial cosmic event, causing momentary awe and providing a few more worthless clues to the nature of the absolute, but offering no human solutions. Nothing consequential had changed for me: I was as fucked up as ever, as hard-core disoriented. The buzzing sunlight grew hotter and hotter; the flies' dance quickened in the rippling air.

At long last a dusty car with a gook corporal at the wheel pulled up beside me. Fierman and Witcover were in back, and Witcover's eye was discolored, swollen shut. I went around to the passenger side, opened the front door and heard behind me a spit-filled, explosive sound. Turning, I saw that a kid of about eight or nine had jumped out of hiding to ambush me. He had a dirt-smeared belly that popped from the waist of his ragged shorts, and he was aiming a toy rifle made of sticks. He shot me again, jiggling the gun to simulate automatic fire. Little monster with slit black eyes. Staring daggers at me, thinking I'd killed his daddy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He probably would have loved it if I had keeled over, clutching my chest; but I wasn't in the mood. I pointed my finger, cocked the thumb and shot him down like a dog.

He stared meanly and fired a third time: this was serious business, and he wanted me to die. "Row-nal Ray-gun," he said, and pretended to spit.

I just laughed and climbed into the car. The gook corporal engaged the gears and we sped off into a boil of dust and light, as if—like Stoner—we were passing through a metaphysical barrier between worlds. My head bounced against the back of the seat, and with each impact I felt that my thoughts were clearing, that a poisonous sediment was being jolted loose and flushed from my bloodstream. Thick silence welled from the rear of the car, and not wanting to ride with hostiles all the way to Saigon, I turned to Witcover and apologized for having hit him. Pressure had done it to me, I told him. That, and bad memories of a bad time. His features tightened into a sour knot and he looked out the window, wholly unforgiving. But I refused to allow his response to disturb me—let him have his petty hate, his grudge, for whatever good it would do him—and I turned away to face the violent green sweep of the jungle, the great troubled rush of the world ahead, with a heart that seemed lighter by an ounce of anger, by one bitterness removed. To the end of that passion, at least, I had become reconciled. ●

NEXT ISSUE

The amazing **HOWARD WALDROP** makes his *IAsfm* debut next issue with our Mid-December cover story, "He-We-Await." A Nebula and World Fantasy Award winner, Waldrop has one of the most fertile imaginations in science fiction today. He's known for his strong, shaggy humor, offbeat erudition, and bizarre fictional juxtapositions, and "He-We-Await" is no exception—indeed, it's prime Waldrop, as he takes us from the Valley of the Kings in ancient Egypt to the concrete canyons of modern-day Manhattan, in pursuit of a mystery over 5,000 years old, a dark and deadly mystery that may determine the fate of humanity... And, of course, Mid-December will also see the third and final installment of our history-making serialization, the stirring conclusion of **HARLAN ELLISON's** *I, Robot: The Movie.*

Also in Mid-December: **GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER** returns after much too long an absence with the unsettling and thought-provoking story of the "King of the Cyber Rifles"; **IAN WATSON** returns with an unconventional look at the *very* odd creatures you might expect to find in a "Hyperzoo"; **ISAAC ASIMOV** treats us to the latest George-and-Azazel story, "Galatea"; and **STEVEN POPKES** takes us across the gulfs of space for a story of passion, hatred, and star-crossed love, in the haunting "Stovelighter." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for the Mid-December issue on your newsstands on November 17, 1987.

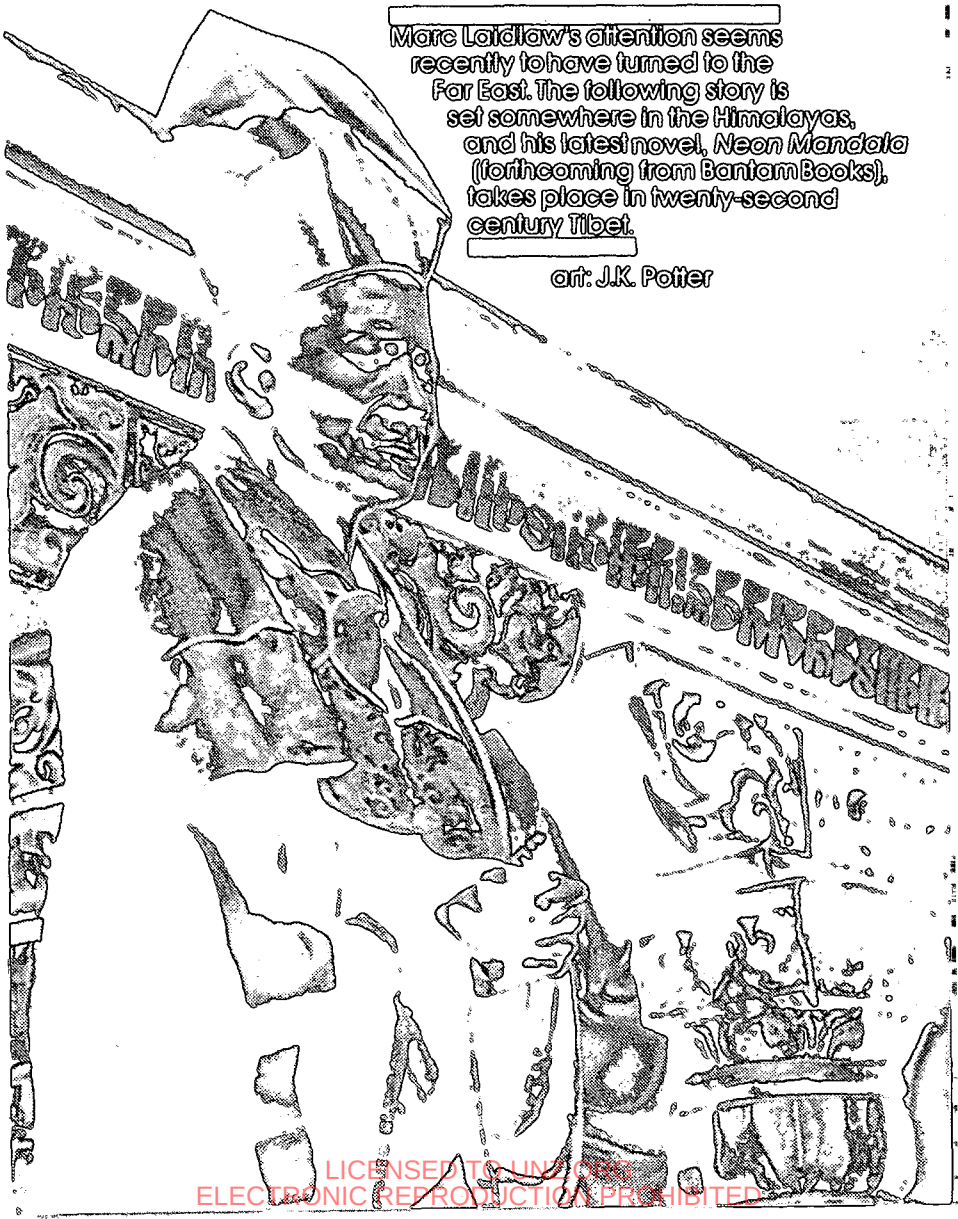
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHALAMARI

by Marc Laidlaw

Marc Laidlaw's attention seems recently to have turned to the Far East. The following story is set somewhere in the Himalayas, and his latest novel, *Neon Mandala* (forthcoming from Bantam Books), takes place in twenty-second century Tibet.

art: J.K. Potter



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pemba set out at dawn from the ancient fortress city, while the snowmelt ran at its lowest ebb through the ravines and irrigation canals. Behind him, in the dark second story of his clay-walled house, he left his wife Sonma in the care of his younger brother, who might also have been the father of the child that now tore at her vitals, as if in a demonic fury to free itself. Her screams had followed him through the narrow streets of the city, louder than the wind above the walls. He could not forget the last sight of fear in his brother Taktser's eyes, as he huddled protectively over the woman to whom both of them were wed. "I won't let her die, Pemba," Taktser had said. "You fetch the Lama of Dzorling and I will keep her alive until you return. Somehow I'll do it."

The city gate opened at dawn. Pemba was there at the head of the crowd, risking his life in the stampede of yaks that were driven out each morning to find what nourishment they could on the Plain of Winds and the surrounding slopes. It was quiet beyond the wall, the light filtered and grey in a gentle snowfall; the winds for which the plain had been named would not rise until noon, when they would bear down the passes from Nepal into Tibet, using the rocky barrens of Kricheb as their accustomed corridor. He stalked ahead, leaning into the snow, thankful that he'd finished weaving himself a new set of grass soles for his boots. With every plait of the fibers he had invoked the protection of those spirits that watched over travelers; this was certain defense against frostbite, but would also keep him from losing his way. He had been to Dzorling, the monastery of the curled stones, only once before, and that many years ago in clear weather. As he passed alongside the canals, between fields plowed in spiral patterns but still unsown with barley, he began to pray that he would keep to the proper path.

An old man when Pemba had saved his life, the Lama of Dzorling must by now be ancient. It would be a grueling journey for him, through the snows and over rough ground, to save a child and its mother. Clearly, if the Lama saved the child, and if it were a boy, it should be brought up for the monastic life. But Pemba and Taktser desperately needed a son to take over the household before age made them decrepit. Oh, let this be a boy, and then let Sonma bear them a second son to enter the monastery, and beyond that a daughter or two, and more sons. Fine! But first, no matter the child's sex, let it live. Let both Sonma and the child live. He prayed that his heart would not be broken like ice in the spring thaw.

By midmorning, the snows of the night had evaporated and the sun was burning his black hair. The wind began to rise. The noon sun found him above the plains, following a little-used track between high cliffs of soft green stone. A recent landslide obliged him to clamber above the path, but the inauspiciousness of this obstacle was countered by his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

discovery of a shalamar in the midst of the slide. It was a black stone in the shape of a spiral, perfectly formed, with the lines of small chambers scoring its sides. He tucked it into the inner pocket of his chuba, knowing that he must be near Dzorling.

He became so accustomed to the twists and turns of the path, and to the desolation of the fantastically colored cliffs towering around him, that when he finally reached the monastic dwellings he almost passed through them without noticing, so intent was he on watching where to place his feet on the narrow and rocky trail. He was called from his concentration by a low, chilling howl—the sound of a god keening its loneliness to the deep blue sky. He looked up, in fear that a monstrous shadow would blot out the turquoise bowl of heaven and the golden coin of the sun. And there he saw Dzorling.

The faces of the cliffs on both sides were scored by the mouths of caves, high and inaccessible as the aeries of birds. But from one of these black holes emerged the silver tip of an immense trumpet whose bellowing echoed back and forth between the crushing walls of stone. Now an ominous drumming began, as if to summon dragons from the sky. Bells began to ring, sustaining ghostly notes right up to the edge of silence. Pemba covered his head and sank down on the trail, moaning. He knew these sounds from festivals—they were meant to chase demons from Kricheb, not to attract them. But it was one thing to hear such sounds in the fortress, surrounded by friends. Here in this desolate realm, the sound filled him with terror. He thought it meant that death had come to Sonma, and now sought him as well.

When the last peal of trumpeting had died out, and the bells had finally faded, Pemba heard a brief sharp cry. Peering out from between his hands he saw the shorn head of a young monk looking down at him.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Pemba. I've come from the capital to see the Lama of Dzorling. Please tell him that my wife is dying."

"The Lama is in meditation," the youth replied. "He won't be out for a year."

"He promised to help me if I needed him. You must tell him—"

"He has not spoken for many years."

"I'm the boy who found him with his feet frozen in a stream and carried him back to Dzorling."

"That won't matter to him. He has loftier concerns. He is learning to inhabit an infinite number of bodies in which to work compassionate acts throughout the universe of sentient suffering beings."

"Surely he can spare one body to visit my wife. I beg you . . ."

"I can't disturb him! There are other lamas in the mountains. Find one who's not so important and doesn't have a million bodies to tend."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pemba, in rage and despair, began to shriek at the young monk. "What kind of fool are you? How did you get to be a monk?"

The boy scowled at him. "It was my father's idea. Do you think I like living in a hole like this, making tea for an old man who won't say a word, fetching nettles for his meals, getting up at dawn to blow that blasted kangling? How would you like to do tens of thousands of full prostrations on a cold rock floor and say mantras until you're hoarse, and read in dim light until you're half blind, and stay up all night visualizing tutelary spirits—*aieee!*"

The young monk disappeared into the cave. Pemba heard breaking crockery and watched patterns of dust sifting out into the air. After a moment the monk reappeared, his scalp smudged with ash, tears in his eyes.

"You'd better come up," he said. "Wait right there."

Several minutes later, the young monk appeared at a bend in the trail. He was a short fellow, skinny but muscular—no doubt from his many prostrations. Upon seeing Pemba, he bowed deeply with his hands cupped before his face, and stuck out his tongue in respect. Then he turned, beckoning for Pemba to follow him. They reached a heavy wooden door hidden back in a tumble of rocks at the face of the cliff. They entered and the young monk barred it from within. They scaled ladder after ladder, rising through a series of caves, some windowless, some overlooking the path. In a few of the rooms, monks sat with eyes half shut, lips moving as they fed polished rosaries through their fingers. The meagerest of fires burned in several chambers, and the walls were hung with tankas—religious paintings whose details he could scarcely discern in the dimness.

Finally they came into a massive temple room, its floor made of smooth wooden beams from days long past, when Kricheb had been a forested region. There was a huge wooden altar at the far end of the room; above it, in the place of honor, were row upon row of huge cloth-wrapped bundles: books. Immense golden images lined the walls, most of them covered with dust.

"Fortunately," the young monk said, "the Lama's seclusion ended precisely when you arrived. I seem to have lost track of the time."

Pemba looked for the Lama, but the chamber was empty except for the two of them. A hundred monks would have been needed to make the place seem at all occupied. It was a huge natural cave, the walls embedded with spiral shalamari like the one in his pocket.

"Wait here," he was told. The monk disappeared between two gem-flecked statues of Buddha. The monastery, like all Kricheb, had outlasted its wealth; it was no longer a religious center for the Himalayas. At the time of his first visit, Dzorling had seemed an active and thriving place,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but perhaps that had been in the festival season, when the itinerant monks came in from their pilgrimages to build offerings, sculpt tormas from barley flour, and receive empowerments and instruction from visiting spiritual teachers. He had almost wished, in those days, that he had been part of the order, for he had envied the monks their hierarchy, the pageantry, the service they did for the infinity of suffering beings. Now he saw the other aspect of their existence: solitude, empty caves, the loneliness of the true ascetic. He thought of his warm two-story house in the fortress city, and the warmer flesh of his wife. Sonma . . . he began to weep for her, staring through a narrow window at the sandstone wall across the way.

"Pemba," said a windy, cavernous voice.

He turned and saw an old man coming toward him, in an orange robe draped with faded yellow scarves. Quickly Pemba fumbled in the pocket of his chuba for the fresh white silk kata he had brought, and bending low he offered the fine scarf to the Lama of Dzorling. The Lama took the kata and draped it around Pemba's own neck and shoulders, bidding him rise.

He did not look any older than he had in Pemba's boyhood, not at first. But as Pemba looked more closely, he began to see that the Lama of Dzorling was only a man, and like any man time had done its work on him. His hair was a thick grey mat, uncombed and unclipped for years. He put a gentle hand on Pemba's shoulder and walked with him to the window, which was fringed by the last remnants of some old brown paper that had probably never kept drafts out of the temple.

"You've come all the way from the fortress to see me? Your wife is ill?"

Pemba could hardly speak at first. He recalled Taktser's great hope for this expedition. How could Sonma still be alive, except by his brother's will? He began to speak of his fears.

Sonma had lost two children, both of them at inauspicious times. The first had slipped out amid much blood, no more than five months along, during a terrible earthquake that had threatened to turn Pemba's house and the fortress walls to rubble; later it was found that a river had changed its course during the tremor, sweeping away a great deal of excellent farmland and drowning the region's most prized chörten, a brightly painted shrine maintained for centuries on the main road. The second child was much closer to term when she lost it. He recalled the night when it had died. He and Sonma had gone up onto the roof where a thicket of branches formed a windbreak, and while they were looking out over the sea of rooftops she had pointed out a star falling from the violet sky toward the sea of eroded, snow-smoothed peaks that surrounded the Plain of Winds. With a gasp she had clutched her belly and turned such a look of sadness toward him that he'd known two things

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at once: that it had been his child and not Taktser's, but that now something fearful had happened—not only to the child, he felt, but to Kricheb. It was stillborn a week later, but for a week she carried the corpse within her, the small death staring blankly out through her eyes. On the day of its birth, the first army of Khampa soldiers had reached the Plain of Winds and demanded grazing rights for their ponies; they were members of Chushi Gangdruk, the Tibetan resistance, and since that date they had lingered in Kricheb, making it the home for their assaults on the Red Chinese, a handful of miles to the north.

"And now the third child has come. I fear it will kill her. She complains that it tears at her heart; she believes it has teeth already and is gnawing at her liver. She has nightmares, horrible dreams that wake the house. She says it is not a child she carries, but a demon."

The Lama thought deeply on this. "She is close to term?"

"By her reckoning, she is past due. She dates the night of conception to an evil dream. We cannot convince her otherwise. Could a demon have come to her in a dream and caused her to conceive?"

"Tell me what you remember of that night."

"Nothing," Pemba said. "Neither my brother nor I remember a thing." He hesitated before admitting his worst fear. "I have wondered if the demon might have entered one of us as we slept, and caused us to lie with her in a nightmare, then entered her through our seed."

The Lama nodded. "That is the usual method."

"No!"

"What I fear most is the conjunction of disasters with your wife's miscarriages. Earthquake, invasion, and what next? In my seclusion, I've seen far too many signs that I should stir and return to the world. I do not know what I can do for your wife, but if I can give some comfort, I will pray for her."

"It is said in the city that you studied medicine in Tibet."

The Lama's lips tightened, then he took a deep breath and seemed to stand taller. "That was long ago, but I have forgotten even the prayers to the Medicine Buddha. Do you know, when I graduated from the college I could identify all the herbs of the field by touch alone—even blindfolded? That is the skill a physician must possess in order to treat wisely. I cannot remember when last I took a pulse. I have let my techniques lapse."

"You must remember something."

"I remember my mistakes," he said. "I swore never to act as physician again; I could not trust myself. You see, I caused a death—not merely allowed it, but caused it with my needles. I pierced the points that could either preserve a man's heart or stop its beating. There was no foreknowing which of these would happen. In the instant I used my knowl-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edge thus, I broke my vows to preserve life. I have been repairing them ever since."

"But surely you had a good reason—"

"Consequences, not reasons, are what follow one. Walled up in a cave, detached from my past, I have never been so crowded by consequences. My past gathers around me like a flock of jabbering ghosts. Can you not hear them calling now?"

"I hear only the wind."

"Then you are fortunate. To me, these caves are full of voices."

"Doctor, you must try."

"There are doctors in the city."

"None trained as you have been. None who use the needles."

The Lama started as though Pemba had thrown a pail of melted snow over him. His eyes were bright, clearer than before, with an angry intensity. "You came to test my vow."

"Which vow? To put away your needles, or to preserve life?"

The Lama shook his head. "All I may be able to do is kill both your wife and child."

Pemba bowed his head and felt the wind rushing up against him from behind. He imagined what it would be like to plunge through the caves, down the trail and through the tortured barrens back to the fortified city, there to see his brother's face and Sonma at the end of her life, there to say, "I could not persuade him to come." But before he began to plead, the Lama touched him lightly.

"I must accept this challenge. For your sake and for that of Kricheb. If your wife loses this child, who knows what disaster may come?"

Relief was a physical sensation, a weakening. He wished he could drop to the ground and let his exhaustion overwhelm him, but the Lama strode away, calling for the young monk: "Jigme, prepare for a journey. We will leave immediately. I hope you've taken good care of that Khampa mule."

"A journey?" the monk said, appearing among the bodhisattvas. His astonishment lit the room like a butter lamp.

"I've been sitting long enough," the Lama said.

With an undignified holler, Jigme rushed from the temple.

Pemba went to the tallest image of the Buddha and unwrapped the kata from his neck. Standing on tiptoe, he just managed to drape it over the figure's open hand.

They reached the city gate at midnight in the midst of a scouring snowstorm. The gate was locked, but the keeper heard their pounding.

"Sonma?" Pemba said. The gatekeeper nodded: "Still alive."

He rushed back to the mule that bore the huddled Lama, led by the bitterly complaining Jigme, and shouted the news to them. When the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gate was shut, the wind cut off behind them, he felt his spirits lifting. By the light of the gatekeeper's lantern, he saw that the Lama slept in the saddle, his lips muttering mantras and the rosary moving through his fingers as he dozed. If he were to die in his sleep, he would be ready with a prayer.

Somehow, word of the Lama's arrival went ahead of them. As they approached Pemba's house, the city's inhabitants appeared along the street, falling prostrate on the cold ground as the mule passed. The door of Pemba's house was open wide, his parents standing to either side, yawning, for they had not slept in days. He waited until the mule had gained the dry lower courtyard, then, leaving his parents to care for the guests, he ran upstairs to the drafty second floor.

Sonma lay stretched out by the fire, her face beaded with sweat. Taktser crouched above her, clutching her hand, his eyes huge and hollow from his vigil.

Pemba sank down beside his brother and their wife and took the hands of each. Taktser whispered, "She's in a fever. She can't stand to be near the fire nor away from it."

Pemba brushed the black hair back from her eyes. Her turquoise beads had been removed. An amber disk was affixed to her forehead, to draw out malign influences. Her eyes were wild and she did not seem to see him at all. He put his hand on her belly and felt an awful stillness.

"Where is he?" Taktser asked. Before Pemba could answer, Jigme rushed into the room, saying, "Here she is. Up here, master!"

The old Lama followed at an effortful pace. He advanced toward the firelight slowly, a folded leather bag under his arm, and knelt down beside Sonma. For a long time he gazed at her and Taktser gazed at him. There was no denying the apparent skill and sagacity of the old Lama as he unfolded his soft leather case and revealed an array of gleaming bone needles.

"I will need boiling water," he said. Pemba's mother hurried to put a pot on the fire, and when it was boiling the Lama dropped in a handful of bitter-smelling powders. He proceeded to bathe and asperge his needles in the infusion, then replaced them in the pouch. All the while, he was chanting in a low voice, his eyes on Sonma.

"As I sat in my cell," he said, "I sometimes could see beyond the rock walls, far out beyond Kricheb, into Tibet itself. I saw a cold blue flame glowing there, a deathly light upon the plains. The Chinese put it there. It turns their millwheels now, where once wind and water did that job. It heats their homes and grinds their grain, so in a sense it nurtures and feeds them with a cold blue fire."

"It is so," Jigme said. "We have sheltered Khampa soldiers after raids into Tibet. They told me many strange things. Far past Lhasa, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chinese have built such a place—a hearth for a new kind of fire. And they've gathered fierce weapons forged in this fire, to which the Khampa muskets are nothing. It frightened me. Do you think such things could come to Kricheb?"

The Lama nodded. "I also dreamed of things that could come to pass. I saw the air filled with trails of fire, like the paths of gunpowder rockets, but glowing that same blue, crisscrossing the air like falling stars—"

Taktser caught Pemba's eye. Pemba nodded to acknowledge that he had told the Lama of the second child, who had died when a star fell.

"—soaring between Tibet and India, falling on lands whose names are like legends: Russia, America. And everywhere they fell, that blue fire spread, and after it came darkness.

"And now here, in this room, I see that fire again. A burning star, a tiny beating heart—a living thing, but a cold thing. I fear as you fear, Jigme, that this is a new demon come to Kricheb."

As he fell silent, every eye in the room lay upon Sonma's belly. Her delirium cleared for a moment, as though clouds were parted by the wind and the stars appeared shining from the black sky. She stared down at her belly and began to scream, "Evil dream! Demon child! Demon!"

The Lama touched her on the forehead and chanted softly until her eyes closed. Still she lay whispering, "Demon . . . demon."

"Your wife is in touch with things far beyond the walls of this old fort," he told Pemba and Taktser. "Perhaps in her pain she has seen more than the Khampas. The woman is the source of creation. I witness these events, but it is through her that they come into the world. I see now that she has been keeping this child back. She fears to give birth to it. With her strong will, she may succeed—but it would kill her."

"What of the father?" Pemba asked. "Who planted this cold blue seed in her womb?"

The Lama shook his head. "I cannot say. Perhaps a demon. Perhaps a star that fell, or a vapor that rose from the earth."

"No," Taktser said suddenly, rising. "It was one of us, Pemba or me. If it is a demon, then we fathered it."

He went to the middle of the room, where there stood a pillar that supported the ceiling. Each New Year's the pillar was daubed with an offering of butter, by which the house was thanked for its shelter; with time the butter grew green and slightly furred. It was common practice to paint wounds with the ointment, which had healing properties. All during Sonma's illness she had taken bits of the green substance on her tongue, in order to cure her vitals. But now, as Taktser went to dab her lips with butter, the Lama gestured that he should refrain. The Lama took the daub from Taktser's fingertip and waved it gently under Sonma's nose.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her brow wrinkled, she began to whimper. With a hand on her forehead, the Lama passed the moistened finger over the length of her body; all the while, she twitched and groaned.

"She cannot take this butter," the Lama declared. "It is beneficial to many, but some possess a natural aversion. It could cause her to sicken and die."

Taktser looked desolate, as if the Lama had accused him of slowly poisoning her all this while.

"It is not magic but medicine," the Lama said firmly but kindly to him. "You could not expect to know its proper application. Let us wait until dawn, when the sun's rays touch the mountain peaks, and then I shall take her pulse and decide what we must do next."

The Lama closed his eyes and, still sitting, fell asleep. Exhaustion also laid its hand on Pemba; before he realized what had happened, Taktser was nudging him awake. A faint light crept in through the tiny windows, less than the light of the hearth. Jigme gave Pemba a cup of salty tea, with a bit of butter placed on the lip as a sign of respect; his eyes spoke apologies for the manner in which he had spoken the previous afternoon. The two brothers and the young monk remained silent as the Lama shook back his voluminous sleeves and took Sonma's wrists in both hands. For the space of perhaps a hundred heartbeats, he sat as if listening to a distant voice while light slowly filled the room and a sparrow began to twitter. They could hear a prayer flag beating in the wind.

Pemba's parents watched from the far end of the room.

The Lama sat back with a grave expression and unfolded his cloth of bone needles. Pemba wanted to ask what he had learned from her pulse, but this was not the time. From among the dozens of sharp needles, the Lama selected two.

He killed a man, Pemba thought suddenly. Why did he tell me that story? He was glad that he had not shared it with Taktser, who looked so trusting of the old man. It was enough that Pemba thought of it now, when he should have felt faith instead. The Lama asked them to turn away while he worked.

Groping in his chuba as he pulled it closer around him, his finger touched the spiral stone, the shalamar, now warmed by his body's heat. Holding the relic, he began to pray. He wondered how long it had lain in the mountains. It must be older than the age of the great kings, now long past. Kricheb had risen and fallen, lost its forests, seen the Buddha come and go. The builders of the fortress had buried themselves in its catacombs. This rock had weathered all of it, curled tightly upon itself, unchanging. It would outlast whatever strange new demons came to the world; it would outlast good and bad alike. Blue fire and black stone. The newest powers and the most ancient.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Behind him, Sonma's breathing quickened; she was gasping now. She moaned. Then she began to breathe more deeply. It took all his will not to turn and look, not to throw the old man aside and pull the needles from his wife's flesh. The Lama had every reason to let the child die. If it were demonic, it would bring great misfortune into the world.

Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the leather case emptying of needles. Only a few remained. The Lama must be applying the points of which he had spoken—the points that saved or killed. That was why he had asked them not to watch. He looked up and saw Jigme staring past him, at Sonma. Why are you allowed to look, young fool, while I must stare at the wall?

Jigme blinked when he saw Pemba looking at him. He smiled and reached out to pat Pemba's hand, nodding.

The old Lama sighed, or had it been Sonma? He looked around, helpless to restrain himself. There she lay, with needles like rays of white light pouring from her, a look of peace on her face. Her eyes were lucid, her breathing easy now.

The Lama snatched out his needles. At last he drew a long spine from her navel. Pemba saw a flash of blue, a ray of cold light shafting up through the ceiling, back to the sky from which it had fallen.

The Lama folded his leather case as Sonma began to gasp. "You may get up now; crouch here, let your husbands squeeze your waist as you bid them." The Lama gestured to the brothers, urging them closer to her, and Pemba found that he was weeping. He threw his arms around his wife's belly, gently, and she gained her feet, crouching by the hearth, her gowns gathered about her waist. He heard the Lama and Jigme and his parents leaving by the stairs. He met Taktser's eyes, clasped his brother's hands, their fingers laced across Sonma's belly. They pushed when she bade them. There was splashing on the blankets and Sonma screamed a last time, her pain transformed to joy as she reached down between her legs. Then both brothers could touch the warm, wet child in that cold room full of the smell of blood and the wail of new life echoing.

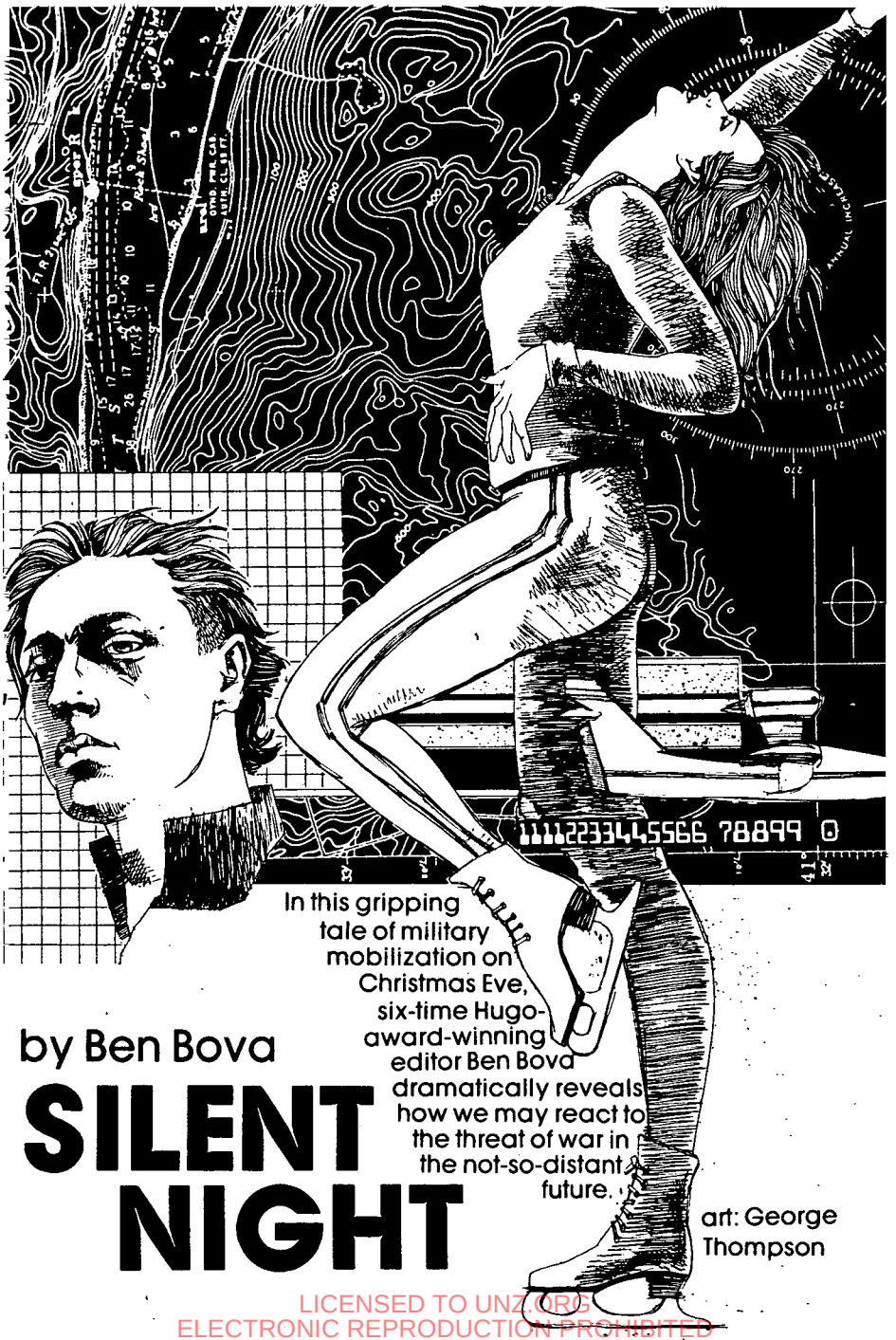
Pemba took the Lama and Jigme as far as the city gate, and would have gone farther except that they would not let him. "We will return to baptize the child and give her a secret name," the Lama promised. "Go back to your wife and daughter now."

"What will you name her?" Jigme asked. "Her common name, I mean."

Pemba smiled and drew the black spiral from his pocket. He slipped the warm stone into the young monk's hands, a gift. There were thousands like it in the monastery, but none that meant so much to him.

"Shalamar," he said. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



In this gripping tale of military mobilization on Christmas Eve, six-time Hugo-award-winning editor Ben Bova dramatically reveals how we may react to the threat of war in the not-so-distant future.

by Ben Bova

SILENT NIGHT

art: George Thompson

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was a tiny figure, skating alone in the darkness. Dow's Lake was firmly frozen this late in December. Earlier in the evening the ice had been covered with skaters in their holiday finery, the pavilion crammed with couples dancing to the heavy beat of rock music.

But this close to midnight, Kelly skated alone, bundled against the cold with a thickly quilted jacket that made her look almost like one of those ragamuffin toy dolls the stores were selling this year.

The wind keened through the empty night. The only light on the ice came from the nearly full moon grinning lopsidedly at Kelly as she spun and spiraled in time to the music in her head.

Swan Lake was playing in her stereo earplugs, the same music she had skated to when she had failed to make the Olympic team. The music's dark passion, its sense of foreboding, fitted Kelly's mood exactly. She skated alone, without audience, without judges. Without anyone.

I don't care, she told herself. It's better alone. I don't need any of them. I can enjoy myself without anybody else.

She was just starting a double axel when the beep from the communicator interrupted the music, startling her so badly that she faltered and went sprawling on her backside.

Sitting spraddle-legged on the ice, Kelly thumbed the communicator at her belt and heard:

"Angel Star, this is Robbie. We've got a crisis. All hands to their stations. Reply at once."

Kelly hated the nickname. Her mother had christened her Stella Angela, but she had grown up to be a feisty, snub-nosed, freckled little redhead, more the neighborhood's tomboy roughneck than an angelic little star. At ten she could beat up any boy in school; at thirteen she had earned a karate black belt. But she could not gain a place on the national skating team. And she could not make friends.

She was stubby, quick with her reflexes and her wits. Her figure was nonexistent, a nearly straight drop from her shoulders to her hips.

And she could not make friends, even after three months of being stationed here in Ottawa.

Picking herself off the ice, Kelly pulled off her right mitten and yanked the pinhead mike from the communicator, its hair-thin wire whirring faintly.

"Okay, Robert, I'm on my way. Seems like a damned odd night for a crisis, if you ask me."

Robbie's voice was dead serious. "We don't make 'em, we just stop 'em from blowing up. Get your little butt down here, sweetie, double quick."

Kelly skated to the dark and empty pavilion, grumbling to herself all the way. My twenty-second birthday tomorrow, she groused silently.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Think they know? Think they care? But underneath the cynical veneer she hoped desperately that they did know and did care. Especially Robert.

The base was less than a mile from the pavilion, a clump of low buildings on the site of the old experimental farm. Kelly rode her electric bike along the bumpy road, man-tall banks of snow on either side, the towers of Ottawa glistening and winking off in the distance, brilliant with their holiday decorations.

Past the wire fence of the perimeter and directly into the big open doors of the main entrance she rode, paying scant attention to the motto engraved above it. Locking the bike in the rack just inside the entrance, she nodded hello to the two guards lounging by the electric heater inside their booth, perfunctorily waved her identification badge at them, then clumped in her winter boots down the ramp toward the underground monitoring center.

If there's a friggin' crisis, she thought, the dumb guards sure don't show it.

In the locker room Kelly stripped off her bulging coat and the boots. She wore the sky-blue uniform of the Peacekeepers beneath it. The silver bars on her shoulders proclaimed her to be a junior lieutenant. A silver stylized T, shaped like an extended, almost mechanical, hand, was clipped to her high collar; it identified her as a teleoperator.

Helluva night to make me come in to work, she complained to herself as she changed into her blue-gray duty fatigues. There are plenty of others who could fill in this shift. Why do they always pick on me? And why can't they make this damned cave warm enough to work in?

But then two more operators clumped in, silent and grim-faced. The men nodded to Kelly; she nodded back.

Shivering slightly against the damp chill, Kelly briefly debated bringing her coat with her into the monitoring center, then decided against it. As she pushed the door to the hall open, another three people in fatigues were hurrying past, down the cold concrete corridor toward the center: two women and a man. One of the women was still zipping her cuffs as she rushed by.

Robbie was outwardly cheerful: a six-three Adonis with a smile that could melt tungsten steel. His uniforms, even his fatigues, fitted him like a second skin. He wore the four-pointed star of a captain on his shoulders.

"Sorry to roust you, tonight of all nights," he said, treating her to his smile. "We've got a bit of a mess shaping up, Angel Star."

If anyone else called her by anything but her last name, Kelly bristled. But she let handsome Robert get away with his pet name for her.

"What's going on?" she asked.

She saw that all ten monitoring consoles were occupied and working,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ten men and women sitting in deeply padded chairs, headsets clamped over their ears, eyes riveted to the banks of display screens curving around them, fingers playing ceaselessly over the keyboards in front of them. Tension sizzled in the air. The room felt hot and crowded, sweaty. Images from the display screens provided the only light, flickering like flames from a fireplace, throwing nervous jittering shadows against the bare concrete walls.

Several of the pilots were lounging in the chairs off to one side, trying to look relaxed even though they knew they might be called to action at any moment. Robert was in charge of this shift, sitting in the communicator's high chair above and behind the monitors. Standing her tallest, Kelly was virtually at eye level with him.

"What *isn't* going on?" Robert replied. "You'd think tonight of all nights everybody'd be at home with their families."

He waved a hand toward the screens as the displays on them blinked back and forth, showing scenes from dozens of locations around the world.

"Got a family of mountain climbers trapped on Mt. Burgess up in the Yukon Territory. Satellite picked up their emergency signal." Kelly saw an infrared image of rugged mountainous country over the shoulder of Jan Van der Meer, one of the few monitors she knew by name.

"And some loony terrorists," Robbie went on, pointing to another console down the line, "tried to hijack one of the nuclear submarines being decommissioned by the U.S. Navy in Connecticut."

Kelly saw the submarine tied to a pier from a ground-level view. Military police in polished steel helmets were leading a ragged gaggle of men and women, their faces smeared with camouflage paint, up the gangway and into a waiting police van.

"But the crisis is Eritrea," said Robert.

"Not again," Kelly blurted. "They've been farting around there for more than a year."

Nodding tightly, Robert touched a button in the armrest of his high chair and pulled the pin mike of his headset down before his lips. "Jan, pick up the Eritrea situation, please."

Van der Meer, a languid, laconic Dutchman whose uniform always seemed too big for him, looked over his shoulder almost shyly and nodded. With his deepset eyes, hollow cheeks and bony face, he looked like a death's head beckoning. He tapped his keypad with a long slim finger, and his display screens showed ghostly images in infrared, taken from a reconnaissance satellite gliding in orbit over the Middle East.

It took Kelly a moment to identify the vague shapes and shadows. Tanks. And behind them, trucks towing artillery pieces. Threading their way in pre-dawn darkness through the mountains along the border of Eritrea.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They're really going to attack?" Kelly asked, her voice suddenly high and squeaky, like a frightened little girl's.

"If we let them," answered Robbie, quite serious now.

"But they must know we'll throw everything we have at them!"

Robert arched his brows, making his smooth young forehead wrinkle slightly. "I guess they think they can get away with it. Maybe they think we won't be able to react fast enough, or their friends in the African Bloc will prevent Geneva from acting at all."

"We just barely did stop the mess in Sri Lanka. Maybe they don't think we've got the muscle to . . ."

"Priority One from Geneva!" called Bailey, the black woman working station three. She was an American, from Los Angeles, tall and leggy and graceful enough to make Kelly ache with jealousy over her good looks and smooth cocoa-butter skin. She had almond-shaped eyes, too, dark and exotic. Kelly's eyes were plain dumb brown.

Robert clamped a hand to his earphone. His eyes narrowed, then shifted to lock onto Kelly's.

Nodding and whispering a response, he pushed the mike up and away, then said, "This is it, kid. Everybody up!"

Kelly felt a surge of electricity tingle through her: part fear, part excitement. The other pilots stirred, too.

"I'm on my way," she said.

But Robert had already shifted his mike down again and was calling through the station's intercom, "Pilots, man your planes. All pilots, man your planes."

As Kelly dashed through the monitoring center's doors and out into the long central corridor, she thought she heard Robbie wishing her good luck. But she wasn't certain.

Doesn't matter, she told herself, knowing it was a lie.

The technicians backed away as Kelly slid into the cockpit and cast a swift professional glance at the instruments. On the screen in front of her she saw the little plane's snub nose, painted dead black, glinting in the predawn starlight.

She clamped her comm set over her chopped-short red hair and listened to her mission briefing. There was no preflight checkout; the technicians did that and punched it into the flight computer. She swung the opaque canopy down and locked it shut, then took off into the darkness, getting her mission profile briefing from Geneva as she flew.

Dozens of planes were being sent against the aggressors, pilots from every available Peacekeepers' station were in their cockpits, hands on their flight controls. There were the usual delays and mixups, but Kelly suddenly felt free and happy, alone at the controls of an agile little flying machine, her every movement answered by a movement of the plane,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her nerves melding with the machine's circuitry, the two of them mated more intimately than a man and a woman could ever be.

The plane was as small as it could be made and still do its job. Using the latest in stealth technology, it flew in virtual silence, its quiet Stirling engine turning the six paddle blades of the propeller so slowly that they barely made a sound. But the plane was slow, painfully slow. Built of wood and plastic for the most part, it was designed to avoid detection by radar and infrared heat-seekers, not to outrun any opposition that might find her.

To make it hard to find visually, Kelly was trained to fly the machine close to the ground, hugging the hills and treetops, flirting with sudden downdrafts that could slam the fragile little plane into the ground.

She thought of herself as a hunting owl, cruising silently through the night, seeking her prey. Everything she needed to know—rather, everything that Geneva could tell her—had been fed to her through her radio earphones. Now, as she flew silently through the dark and treacherous mountain passes on the border of Eritrea, she maintained radio silence.

I am an owl, Kelly told herself, a hunting owl. But there were hawks in the air, and the hunter must not allow herself to become the hunted. A modern jet fighter armed with air-to-air missiles or machine cannon that fired thousands of rounds per minute could destroy her within moments of sighting her. And the second or two delay built into her control system bothered her; a couple of seconds could be the difference between life and death.

But they've got to see me first, Kelly told herself. Be silent. Be invisible.

Despite the cold, she was perspiring now. Not from fear; it was the good kind of sweat that comes from a workout, from preparation for the kind of action that your mind and body have trained for over long grueling months.

Virtually all the plane's systems were tied to buttons on the control column's head. With the flick of her thumb Kelly could make the plane loop or roll or angle steeply up into the dark sky. Like a figure skater, she thought. You and me, machine, we'll show them some Olympic style before we're through.

She was picking up aggressor radio transmissions in her earphones now: she could not understand the language, so she flicked the rocker switch on the control board to her left that activated the language computer. It was too slow to be of much help, but it got a few words:

". . . tank column A . . . jumpoff line . . . deploy . . ."

With her left hand she tapped out a sequence on the ECM board, just by her elbow, then activated the sequence with the barest touch of a finger on the black button set into the gray control column head.

Thousands of tiny metallic slivers poured out of a hatch just behind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cockpit, scattering into the dark night air like sparkling crystals of snow. But these flakes, monomolecular thin, floated lightly in the calm pre-dawn air. They would hover and drift for hours, wafting along on any stray air current that happened by, jamming radio communications up and down thousands of megahertz of the frequency scale.

First rule of Peacekeeper tactics: Modern warfare is heavily dependent on electronic communications. Screw up their comm system and you screw up their attack.

Leaving a long cloud of jamming chaff behind her, Kelly swooped down a rugged tree-covered valley so low that she almost felt leaves brushing the plane's underside. A river glinted in the faint light. Kelly switched her display screen to infrared and, sure enough, there was a column of tanks snaking along the road that hugged the riverbank. Gray ugly bulks with long cannons poking out like stiffened snouts.

Have fun with your radios, fellas, she called to them silently.

If the tanks reached the border and actually crossed into Sudanese territory, they would be guilty of aggression, and small, smart missiles launched from Peacekeeper command-and-control planes would greet them. But until they crossed the border, their crews were not to be endangered.

Second rule of Peacekeeper tactics: You can't counterattack until the aggressor attacks. Show enough force to convince the aggressor that his attack will be stopped, but launch no weapon until aggression actually takes place.

Corollary No. 1: It makes no difference *why* an attack is launched, or by whom. The Peacekeepers' mission is to prevent the attack from succeeding. We are police, not judges.

Kelly had seen what those smart missiles could do. Barely an arm's length in size, their warheads were nonexplosive slugs of spent uranium, so dense that they sliced through a hundred millimeters of armor like a bullet goes through butter.

Third rule of Peacekeeper tactics: Destroy the weapons, not the men—when possible.

But a tank is a rolling armory, filled with flammable fuel and explosive ammunition. Hit it with a hypervelocity slug almost anywhere and it will burst into flame or blow up like a mini volcano. The men inside have no chance to escape. And the missile, small as it is, is directed by a thumbnail-sized computer chip that will guide it to its target with the dogged accuracy of a Mach 10 assassin.

Banking slightly for a better look at the slowly moving column of tanks, Kelly found herself wishing that her chaff fouled their communications so thoroughly that they had to stop short of the border. Otherwise, most of those million-dollar tanks would be destroyed by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thousand-dollar missiles. And the men in them would die. Young men foolish enough to believe that their nation had a right to invade its neighbor. Or serious enough to believe that they must obey their orders, no matter what. Young men who looked forward to life, to marriage, to families, and honored old age where they would tell their grandchildren stories about their famous battles and noble heroism.

They would die ingloriously, roasted inside their tanks, screaming with their last breath as the flames seared their lungs.

But she had other work to do.

Fourth rule of Peacekeeper tactics: A mechanized army needs fuel and ammunition. Cut off those supplies and you stop the army just as effectively as if you had killed all its troops.

Kelly's plane was a scout, not a missile platform. It was unarmed. If she was a hunting owl, she hunted for information, not victims. Somewhere in this treacherous maze of deeply scoured river valleys and arid tablelands there were supply dumps, fuel depots, ammunition magazines that provided the blood and sinew of the attacking army. Kelly's task was to find them. Quickly.

If it had been an easy assignment, she would not have gotten it. If the dumps could have been found by satellite reconnaissance, they would already be targeted for attack. But the Eritreans had worked long and patiently for this invasion of their neighbor. They had dug their supply dumps deeply underground, as protection against both the prying satellite eyes of the Peacekeepers and the inevitable pounding of missiles and long-range artillery, once the dumps had been located.

Kelly and her owl-like aircraft had to fly through those tortuous valleys hunting, seeking, scanning up and down the spectrum with sensors that could detect heat, light, magnetic fields, even odors. And she had to find the dumps before the sun got high enough to fill those valleys with light. In daylight, her little unarmed craft would be spotted, inevitably. And once found, it would be swiftly and mercilessly destroyed.

All her sensors were alive and scanning now, as Kelly gently, deftly flew the tiny plane down one twisting valley after another. She felt tense, yet strangely at peace. She knew the stakes, and the danger, yet as long as she was at the controls of her agile little craft she was happy. Like being alone out on the ice: nothing in the world mattered except your own actions. There was no audience here, no judges. Kelly felt happy and free. And alone.

But the eastern sky was brightening, and her time was growing short.

The sensors were picking up data now, large clumps of metal buried *here*, unmistakable heat radiations emanating from *there*, molecules of human sweat and machine oil and plastic explosive wafting from that mound of freshly turned earth. She squirted the data in highly com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pressed bursts of laser light up to a waiting satellite, hoping that the Eritreans did not have the sophisticated comm equipment needed to detect such transmissions and home in on her plane.

There were many such planes flitting across the honeycomb of valleys, each pilot hoping that the Eritreans did not catch its transmissions, did not find it before it had completed its task and flown safely home.

Small stuff, Kelly realized as she scanned the data her screens displayed. None of the dumps she had found were terribly important. Local depots for the reserves. Where was the big stuff, the major ammo and fuel supplies for the main forces? It couldn't be further back, deeper inside the country, she reasoned. They must have dug it in somewhere closer to the border.

The sky was bright enough now to make the stars fade, although the ground below her was still cloaked in shadow. Kelly debated asking Geneva for permission to turn around, rather than continue her route deeper into the Eritrean territory.

"Fuck it," she muttered to herself. "By the time they make up their minds it'll be broad daylight out here."

She banked the little plane on its left wingtip and started to retrace her path. Climbing above the crest of the valley, she began a weaving flight path that took her back and forth across the four major valley chains of her assigned territory.

There's got to be a major dump around here somewhere, she insisted to herself. There's got to be.

If there were not, she knew, she was in trouble. If the main supply dump was deeper inside Eritrea and she had missed it because she had failed to carry out her full assignment, she would be risking the lives not only of Eritreans and Sudanese, but Peacekeepers as well. She would be risking her own career, her own future, too.

The plane's sensors faithfully picked up all the small dumps she had found on her flight in. Even this high up, they were detectable.

She felt a jolt of panic when she noticed the shadow of her plane racing along the ground ahead of her. The sun was up over the horizon now, and she was high enough to be easily visible to anyone who happened to look up.

Gritting her teeth, she kept stubbornly on her plan, crisscrossing the valleys, back and forth, weaving a path to the frontier. She could see columns of tanks and trucks below her, some of them moving sluggishly forward, others stopped. Long ugly artillery pieces were firing now, sending shells whistling across the border into the Sudan.

The attack had started.

Far ahead, she saw columns of smoke rising black and oily into the brightening sky. Men were dying there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quickly she flicked her fingers across the display controls. Forward and rear observation scopes: no other aircraft in sight. So far so good, she thought. I haven't been found. Yet.

The infrared scanner showed an anomaly off to her left: a hot spot along the face of a steep rocky slope that plunged down to the river bed. Kelly banked slightly and watched the sensor displays hopefully.

It was a cave in the face of the deeply scoured hillside. Ages of sudden rainstorms had seamed the slope like rumpled gray corduroy.

"Just a friggin' cave," Kelly muttered, disappointed. Until she noticed that a fairly broad road had been built up in a series of switchbacks from the valley floor to the lip of the cave's entrance. It was a dirt road, rough, dangerous if it rained. But this was the dry season, and a single truck was jouncing up that road at a fairly high rate of speed, spewing a rooster tail of dust from its rear tires.

Kelly coasted her plane lower, below the crest of the hills that formed the valley. Hidden down among the scruffy trees that lined the riverbank was a column of trucks, their motors running, judging from the heat emissions.

Punching her comm keypad furiously, Kelly sang into her microphone, "I've found it! Major supply dump, not more than ten klicks from the frontier!"

She knew that the monitors in Geneva—and Ottawa, for that matter—would home in on her transmission. So would the Eritreans, most likely.

It was not Robbie's voice that replied, an agonizing ten seconds later, "It *might* be a supply dump, but how can you be sure?"

"The truck convoy, dammit!" Kelly shouted back, annoyed. "They're starting up the road!"

And they were. The trucks seemed empty. They were going up the steep road to the cavern, where they would be loaded with the fuel and ammunition necessary to continue the battle.

"Even if you are right," came the voice from Geneva—tense, a slight Norse accent in it—"we have no means to get at the dump. It is too well protected."

Kelly said nothing. She knew what would come next.

"Return to your base of operations. Your mission is terminated."

Kelly bit her lip in frustration. Then a warning beep on her instrument panel told her that she was being scanned by a radar beam. Ordinarily that would not have bothered her. But in morning's brightening light, with a few hundred enemy soldiers below her, she knew she was in trouble.

By reflex, she craned her head to look above, then checked the display

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

screens. A couple of contrails way up there. If she tried to climb out of this valley those two jet fighters would be on her like stooping hawks.

Kelly took a deep breath and weighed her options. Blowing her breath out through puffed cheeks, she said aloud, "Might as well find out for sure if I'm right."

She pushed the throttle forward and angled the little plane directly toward the mouth of the cave.

Tracers sizzled past her forward screen and her acoustic sensors picked up the sounds of many shots: small-arms fire, for the most part. The troops down there were using her for target practice. They're lousy shots, Kelly told herself. Then she added, Thank God.

Kelly dove at maximum speed, nearly as fast as a modern sports car, through a fusilade of rifle and machine-gun fire, and flew directly at the yawning cavern. It was dark inside, but the plane's sensors immediately displayed the forward view in false-color infrared.

It's their main dump, all right, Kelly told herself. She saw it all as if in freeze-frame, a bare fraction of a second yet she made out every detail.

Dozens of trucks were already inside the mammoth cave, in the process of being loaded by troops suddenly startled to find an airplane buzzing straight at them. Some men stood frozen with wide-eyed fright, staring directly at her, while others were scattering, ducking under the trucks or racing for the cave's entrance.

The cave was crammed with stacks of fuel drums, cases of ammunition. Be nice to know who they bought all this crap from, Kelly thought. For the briefest flash of an instant she considered trying to pull up and eluding the fighters waiting for her. Maybe the cameras have picked up valuable information on who's supplying this war, she thought.

But she knew that was idle fancy. This mission was terminated. Not by Geneva, but by the gunners who would shoot the plane to pieces once she tried to make it to the border.

So she did not pull up. She leaned on the throttle, hurtling the plane directly into the cave's mouth and a massive stack of fuel drums. She neither heard nor felt the explosion.

For long seconds Kelly sat in the contoured chair of the cockpit, staring at the darkened screen. Her hands were trembling too badly to even try to unlatch the canopy. A technician lifted it open and stared down at her. Usually the techs were grinning and cracking jokes after a mission. But this one looked solemn.

"You okay?" she asked.

Kelly managed a nod. Sure, she answered silently. For a pilot who's just kamikazed, I'm fine.

Another tech, a swarthy male, appeared on the other side of the cockpit and helped Kelly to her feet. She stepped carefully over the control banks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and onto the concrete floor of the Ottawa station's teleoperations chamber. Two other teleoperator cockpits were tightly closed, with teams of technicians huddled over the consoles grouped around them. The fourth cockpit was open and empty.

The captain in charge of the station's teleoperations unit strode from his desk toward Kelly, his face grim. He was a sour-faced, stocky Oriental with a vaguely menacing moustache, all formality and spit and polish.

"We lost one RPV due to ground fire," he said in a furious whisper, "and one deliberately destroyed by its operator."

"But I . . ."

"There is no need for you to defend yourself, Lieutenant Kelly. A board of review will examine the tapes of your mission and make its recommendations. Dismissed."

He turned on his polished heel and strode back to his desk.

Anger replaced Kelly's emotional exhaustion. RPV, she fumed to herself. Operator. They're *planes,* dammit. And I'm a pilot!

But she knew it was not so. They were remotely piloted vehicles, just as the captain had said. And expensive enough so that deliberately crashing one was cause for a review board to be convened. Then Kelly remembered that she had also tossed away her prescribed flight plan. The review board would not go easily, she realized.

She dragged herself tiredly down the corridor toward the locker room, longing now for her bunk and the oblivion of sleep.

Halfway there, Robbie popped out of the monitoring center, his smile dazzling.

"Hi there, Angel Star! Good job!"

Kelly forced the corners of her mouth upward a notch. From behind Robbie's tall, broad-shouldered form she saw most of the other monitors pushing through the doors and spilling out into the corridor. It can't be a shift change, she thought. Nobody else has gone in.

Robbie caught the puzzlement on her face.

"It's all over," he said brightly. "The Eritreans called it quits a few minutes ago."

"They stopped the invasion?"

"We beat them back. Clobbered the tanks in their first wave and demolished most of their supply dumps."

The rest of the monitor team headed down the corridor toward the locker room, chattering like schoolkids suddenly let loose.

"Somebody," Robbie added archly, "even knocked out their main ammo dump."

"That was me," Kelly said weakly.

Throwing an arm around her slim shoulders, Robbie laughed. "I know! We saw it on the screens. The explosion shook down half the mountain."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Must have killed a lot of men," she heard herself say.

"Not as many as a full-fledged war would have taken."

Kelly knew the truth of it, but it was scant comfort.

"They started it," Robbie said, more softly. "It's not your fault."

"It's my responsibility. So was the plane."

Robbie broke out his dazzling grin again. "Worried about a review board? Don't be. They'll end up pinning a medal on you."

Somehow Kelly could not visualize that.

"Come on, Angel Star," Robbie said, with a one-armed hug, "don't be glum, chum. We're going out to celebrate."

"Now?"

"It's Christmas, isn't it? You didn't see a big sleigh pulled by reindeer while you were flinging around out there, did you?"

Kelly grinned. "No, I don't think so."

With his arm still around her shoulders, Robbie started for the locker room. "I'm throwing a party in my quarters. You're invited."

Kelly let him half-drag her to the locker room. Van der Meer and Bailey were already there, pulling on their heavy winter coats.

"Hello there, little sister," Bailey called to her. "Nice job."

The whole group trudged up the sloping corridor and past the guards, who still sat close to the electric heater in their little booth. If they were aware that a war had just been started and stopped within the span of the past hour or so, they gave no indication of it.

"You're quite a flier," Robbie said to her. "You'll have to give me lessons; I'd love to learn how to fly."

Kelly gulped and swallowed, glad that it was too dark for him to see the expression on her face. I've never flown a real plane, up in the air, she wanted to confess. Only simulators and teleoperations. But she kept silent, too afraid of breaking the crystal beauty of this moment.

The sky was still dark and sprinkled with stars, the air bitingly cold. As she followed along beside Robbie and the others, snow crunching under their boots, Kelly glanced over her shoulder at the sign carved above the base's entrance:

INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCE
NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NATION

We stopped a war, she said to herself. It cost some lives, but we protected the peace. Then she remembered, It might also cost me my job.

"Don't look so down, girl," Bailey assured her. "The review board ain't gonna go hard on you."

"I hope," said Kelly.

"Don't worry about it," Bailey insisted.

Kelly trudged along, heading for the officers' dormitory across the road from the underground nerve center of the base.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Should I tell them? she asked herself. They wouldn't care. Or maybe they'd think I was just trying to call attention to myself.

But she heard herself saying, "You know, this is my birthday. Today. Christmas Day."

"Really?" said Van der Meer.

"Happy birthday, little sister," Bailey said.

Robbie pushed his coat sleeve back and peered at his wristwatch. "Not just yet, Angel Star. Got another few ticks to go . . ."

Then they heard, far off in the distance, the sound of voices singing.

"Your watch must be slow," said Bailey. "The midnight chorale's already started."

"Their clock must be fast," Robbie countered.

The whole group of them stopped in the clear night air and listened to the children's voices, coming as if from another world. Kelly stood between tall Robert and beautiful, warm Bailey and felt as if they were singing especially to her.

"*Silent night . . .*

Holy night . . .

All is calm, all is bright . . ." ●

GAMING

(from page 16)

ergy gets too low to enter hyperspace, you are just absorbed by the Sentry, ending the game.

If you're in some valley or behind a boulder—where the Sentry can't see you—there's a possibility the Sentry can transform a nearby tree into a "meany," a miniature version of the Sentry, capable of absorbing your energy.

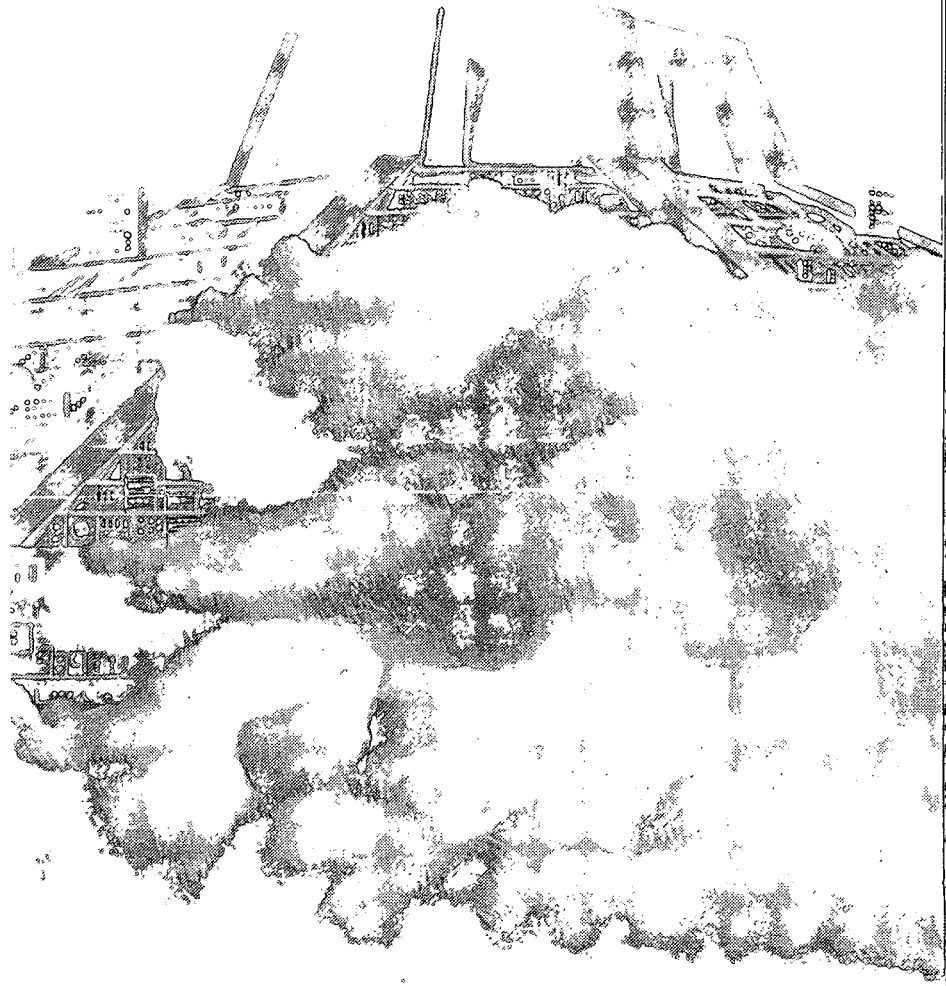
Key strategies, like using boulders to shield one's robot from the Sentry, and stacking boulders to make a perch for a robot become second nature. Anticipating the scan of the Sentry and keeping your robot moving ever upward are not so easily done.

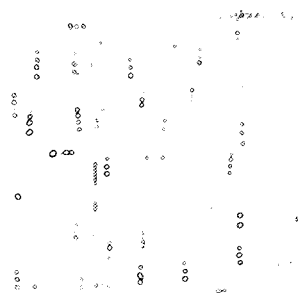
The graphics are clear, three-dimensional vector images, that, despite an occasional odd view when you're staring right at the broad white side of a boulder, give an impressive feel to the alien landscape. The viewscreen of the robot allows the player to turn three hundred and sixty degrees around and eighty degrees up or down, and it's suggested that you take a good look around before attempting to move against the Sentry.

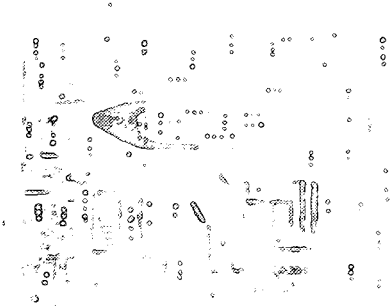
Believe me, *The Sentry* is a rare game. If there are games of the future—and very few I've seen create a real feeling of playing with a twenty-first century toy—*The Sentry* is undoubtedly one of them. Like chess, its basic principles are quickly grasped, but mastering even one landscape is a heady victory.

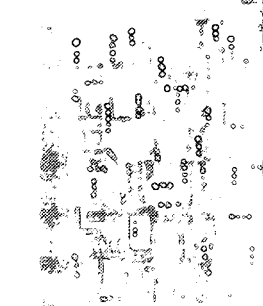
And to think that there are 9,999 more just boggles my earth-bound mind. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED









LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I, ROBOT: THE MOVIE

(Part Two of Three)

by Harlan Ellison

art: Terry Lee

An enigma named Susan Calvin Bratenahl's single-minded drive to discover the mystery lying at the core of her life threatens to ruin his own. But voices from the past may hold the codex.

(SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE)

It is 2076. **Robert Bratenahl,** *reporting for* Cosmos *Magazine at the funeral on Aldebaran-C XII of* **Stephen Byerley,** *First President of the Galactic Federation, recognizes* **Susan Calvin** *among the graveside mourners. Susan, eight-two, retired chief robopsychologist of U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men/U.S. RoboMek, has not been seen for more than twenty years; a long-standing rumor has it that she and Byerley were lovers.*

Bratenahl's boss, Cosmos *editor* **Rowe,** *instructs him to interview Susan, at all costs. Bratenahl protests: invading Susan's personal space could cost him his teleport-booth matrix: Will* Cosmos *back him? "All the way," Rowe assures him.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Susan, backed by a pair of polite but menacing chaperons, rebuffs the interview and vanishes into a teleport booth for no one knows where. Bratenahl teleports to Sigma Draconis 5 and **Bernice Jolo,** *a surgeon with whom he has had an ongoing affair. Bernice's father once operated on Susan Calvin. While there, Bratenahl reviews a memoir cassette recorded in 2034 on his deathbed by* **Alfred Lanning,** *First Director of U.S. Robot Corporation, which tells the story of "Robbie."*

Robot playmate to six-year-old Susan Calvin, **Robbie** *is returned to the U.S. Robots factory at the insistence of* **Belinda Calvin,** *Susan's stepmother. It is 2000, the time of the robot pogroms inspired by the Reverend* **Malachi Soldash** *and his Church of the Mortal Flesh; and Belinda Calvin, already golemophobic, gives Susan's father,* **Edward Calvin,** *the choice of saving his marriage or keeping the robot. Susan is, of course, as distraught as only a six-year-old can be. To prove to her that Robbie is not a person but a thing, Belinda and Edward take Susan to the U.S. Robots factory where Susan, seeing her dear playmate working among other robots, rushes down to the assembly line and into the path of a massive robot body hanging from an overhead conveyor belt; Robbie saves Susan, but is later destroyed by a crazed mob during the height of the pogroms. To placate the Church and the Unions (who see robots as taking away human jobs), robots are banned from Earth.*

Deducing Susan Calvin's general whereabouts from remarks Bernice made regarding her father, Bratenahl teleports to Brazil, Old Earth, where he finds **Simon Haskell,** *straw-boss to a colony of construction* marabunta *(ecitons; army ants) in the Mato Grosso jungle. Bribing the ants with a jar of chocolate syrup and Simon with a first issue of* Whiz Comics *featuring Captain Marvel, Bratenahl learns that Susan has her own city/home built beneath the ruins of the lost city of* Xingú Xavante; *Simon leads Bratenahl to a ventilation shaft found by the ants.*

Bratenhal sneaks into the city only to be caught by Susan's guards. Escaping them, he finds himself in a gigantic underground museum, and then face to face with Susan Calvin. Startled, Susan drops the priceless ancient jar she is cleaning and it shatters into a billion pieces. Leave me alone, Susan tells Bratenahl, adding, "The laws of invasion of personal space were created specifically for people like you." The guards come up behind him; Bratenahl bolts and is shot by a stun-gun.

Back in the Cosmos *offices, Bratenahl comes to. Rowe, his editor, is furious. Susan Calvin is suing* Cosmos *for invasion of her personal space, so not only is Bratenahl off the story, he's fired. Plus, the Jurisprudence League on Capella has pulled his matrix: Bratenahl is grounded for the rest of his life.*

"You sonofabitch!" cries Bratenahl. "You're *the one shoved me* into *this! You said you'd back me!" Try and prove it, Rowe says with a nasty grin. Enraged, Bratenahl slams his fist into Rowe's face, and the editor thumps into the wall, slips, sits down half-conscious. Bratenahl is standing over him, fits balled, waiting. Finally Rowe pulls himself up, face swollen, eye closing, and says:*

"Get outta here. You're dead in the water, son."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

137 CONTINUED:

They stare at each other for a long moment, then Rowe wipes blood from the corner of his mouth, turns, and puts the bloody hand palm flat against the long, high blank wall. The section of wall revolves, and there is an egglike chair with electronic feeds like brain wave tendrils coming from it. He slumps into the egg, it seems to fit close around him, as though he had sat in pudding, and almost instantly we HEAR in SOFT VOICES UNDER the sound of reporters all over the galaxy feeding in to his brain. This is the central core of *Cosmos*, the editor linked directly to his sources, pouring in pictures and data from the field. His eyes close as he begins to move his lips silently, as though talking in his sleep. Bratenahl stands and stares at him a beat, as the crowd watches; then he turns away helplessly as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

138 LONG SHOT – ESTABLISHING – THE ARCOLOGIES – NIGHT

The cityscape dreams of contemporary architect Paolo Soleri realized. Huge cities built as single buildings, octagonal-shaped, many-tiered, holding a quarter of a million people each, ten miles high, set out on empty and arid plains. MOVING IN on one of these "arcologies" as Soleri calls them. MOVING IN on one speck of light in the immense structure, one lighted window . . . save that the size of this city is so great, it is merely a speck of light, no more.

MOVE IN AND
DISSOLVE THRU TO:

139 INT. WOODLANDS APARTMENT – NIGHT

STILL MOVING IN to maintain linkage of exterior/interior. This is Bratenahl's personal living space. It is, quite literally, an indoor woodlands construct, with a tiny brook pattering against grassy banks, trees of half a hundred different kinds, some of them even reminiscent of Old Earth. It is night in the woodland, but with a soft, fairy quality, like something from "A Midsummer's Night's Dream." CAMERA MOVES IN STEADILY on Bratenahl, sitting hunched over a desktop comm unit, and we see tapes running in disordered sequence, across the face of the screen. He is plugged in with an ear-jack, so we cannot HEAR what he's listening to—all we HEAR is the SOUND of the woods at night—but we recognize some of the faces in those tapes: Edward Calvin, Susan Calvin, Stephen Byerley, Alfred Lanning, news cuts of the Robot Pogroms . . . in short, we perceive that he continues to be obsessed. He rubs his eyes wearily. He has apparently been at it for a long time. There is the SOUND of a gentle CHIME. He looks up, looks

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

139 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)
around as if just coming to awareness of his location, and speaks to the machine.

BRATENAHL
Kill it.

Screen goes to readout red.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Who's at the door?

Screen shows him Rowe standing at the guard entrance, the wall-mounted, swivel-based laser weapon aimed at him as is the custom in all security-protected arcologies housing so many thousands of people. Rowe has a plastic bandage covering his cheek and nose.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Let him hear me.
(beat; to screen)
What do you want, butcher? The slaughterhouses are on the third level.

ROWE
Open up, I want to talk to you.

BRATENAHL
Go to hell.

ROWE
Open up, you dumb bastard! It's not what it seems to be!

Bratenahl stares at the screen for a long moment. He walks around the room for a bit, then sighs, expelling breath in weary resignation.

BRATENAHL
Central . . . open the door.

He turns to the right and a light shines through the woods. It falls across the grass that is carpet, and strikes the simple, comfortable furniture carved from rosewood. Rowe comes through the trees, following the light-path, into Bratenahl's "living room." As they confront each other, the light vanishes, leaving them in dusky woodsiness.

They stand silently for a moment.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
I'm locked in. The booths have been coded to reject my matrix. Just like a common criminal.

ROWE
I couldn't do anything about that.
(beat)
But I can circumvent it.

Rowe sits down, makes himself comfortable.

ROWE (CONT'D.)
Pay attention. I pushed you that hard back at the shop so the word would get out you were off the project.

Bratenahl is astounded.

BRATENAHL
That was all for *show*?

ROWE
Yeah. Otherwise I'd've broken your fucking back for hitting me like that.
(beat)
I want this story, and I'm stuck with you as the only one who can get it for me.

BRATENAHL
(yells)
Don't you know how to get anything out of people except by intimidation?

ROWE
No. I had an unhappy childhood.

BRATENAHL
So did your momma!

Rowe moves fast. Faster than such a fireplug should be able to move. In a bound he's out of the chair, over to the taller man and he clips Bratenahl a short, hard one right under the heart. Bratenahl collapses, sits down fast and completely. Rowe goes back to the chair, sits down. He waits for the pain to clear out of Bratenahl's eyes somewhat, then he starts talking. Bratenahl cannot speak.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROWE
Don't talk, kiddo. Just listen.
(beat)
You're doing okay so far. You found her. That's a big plus.

Bratenahl tries to get up, slips back onto one elbow.

ROWE (CONT'D.)
I've pulled a surrogate matrix for you. Don't ask how.

He reaches into his pouch, pulls out some papers, several slips of plastic, and lays them on the desk nearby.

ROWE (CONT'D.)
Booth coordinates. Names of two men who worked with Calvin. I'm told they can give you plenty of special information if you do it right.
(beat)
Take off as soon as you can.

He gets up, starts to go. Bratenahl is still on the floor. He stops, turns around, looks down at Bratenahl.

ROWE (CONT'D.)
You don't have to like me, kiddo. But play this one out with me and you'll be better than anyone's been at this game in a long time.
(beat)
I'm a shit, Bratenahl; but I go all the way. And you've got the stuff to be better than you think you are. Trust me, and you'll be talking about this the rest of your life.

He goes. Bratenahl still lies there on the floor as we:

DISSOLVE TO:

140 EXT. KITALPHA XVI – NIGHT

A BLAZING BALL OF SPIRAL LIGHTNING. FRAME ELECTRIC BLUE-WHITE as CAMERA DRAWS BACK and we see the sky of the 16th planet of the star Kitalpha in the constellation Equuleus. CAMERA BACK as we HEAR the incredible deafening crackle

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(CONT'D.)

and whine of a billion bolts of lightning as they fill the night sky. Kitalpha XVI is a planet with an atmosphere heavy in ozone, producing eternal electrical storms. Nothing can live on the surface. It is pitted and cratered from forks of murderous lightning pounding the planet constantly. CAMERA BACK TO FULL SHOT of planet then DOWN AND IN on a teleport booth pyramid (see Scene 14 for description). We also see, not too far distant from the booth, a battered spaceship, rising into the sky. It is pocked and worn from much use, hardly a new model, and yet somehow valiant-looking. It is surrounded by a spidery webbing of metal lines and coils, a cat's cradle that serves as lightning rod to damp the ferocious assault of electricity from the sky. And as CAMERA COMES DOWN and IN on the pyramid, we see a figure emerge from the base of the spaceship and lope rapidly toward the pyramid.

CAMERA DOWN to CLOSE SHOT on teleport booth pyramid as the figure reaches it. We realize it is a robot. He is almost comical, he is so antiquated. Thin legs and arms, a rather amusing placement of the photoelectric eyes and other features. He is also rather rusty and tarnished. He wears a sort of wire crown that has coils jutting up. It is a smaller version of the lightning-rod arrangement that surrounds the ship and protects him from being blown in half by the storm. He carries a duplicate lightning-rod crown. His name is FRINKEL.

As he reaches the pyramid booth, one of the walls pivots open (same technique as in Scene 14), we see a stream of tracerlike lights coming out of the darkness toward the opening, and in an instant Robert Bratenahl materializes as his atoms gather together. As he steps forward, Frinkel reaches inside and places the crown on Bratenahl's head. A sudden blast of lightning nearby makes Bratenahl blink. He throws up his hands, steps back into the booth a pace.

FRINKEL
(rusty voice)
I'm Frinkel, sir. Mr. Donovan and Mr. Powell sent me to fetch you. We just received coordinates for your arrival. Please wear the crown, sir. It's a lightning protector.

Bratenahl, blinking furiously from the aerial pyrotechnics, starting and jumping at every blast of lightning that hits in the vicinity, comes forward cautiously.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

140 CONTINUED: – 2

FRINKEL (CONT'D.)
You'll get used to it, sir. It never stops. Atmosphere's heavy with ozone.
(beat)
But, uh, let's hurry to the ship, please. They're waiting for you.

Bratenahl, almost petrified by what he's walked into, nods. Frinkel turns and starts off at a slower lope than we know he's capable of maintaining. He's letting Bratenahl keep up with him. A nearby blast adds wings to Bratenahl's feet. They rush away FROM CAMERA toward the spaceship as the wall of the teleport booth slides back into place. CAMERA HOLDS them running across the blasted plain toward the ship as we

DISSOLVE TO:

141 INT. SPACESHIP SALOON – FULL SHOT

Frinkel stands against the wall, waiting quietly. It is a large cabin, circular of course, with a panoramic windowscreen shield lowered to present a thin, semicircular backdrop of the exterior of the planet, washed and battered by a constant play of lightning bolts. But save for an occasional *thump!* as a bolt hits the earth close by, reverberating through the ship, or a crackling *sizzle!* that sends St. Elmo's Fire around the cabin as the lightning-rod superstructure outside soaks up the power, there is no noise in the cabin . . . except for music. It is the piano music of Robert Schumann (1810–1856), specifically the *Kreisleriana*, opus 16. (Recommended: the Alicia De Larrocha recording on London.)

Bratenahl sits in a swivel seat with the stuffing coming out at the arms. Across from him is MICHAEL DONOVAN, in his nineties, slim, brown as fried butter from exposure to a million suns. A weathered old spaceman wearing a torn tunic and cutoffs that expose his scrawny, blue-veined, knobbly-kneed legs. But he has an incredibly kind face. The eyes are deepset and bright, in a face as old as an Egyptian glyph. For his age, he is in remarkable physical condition. But he *is* old, very old. And very thin.

Across the cabin, sitting at a chessboard on a low table, is Donovan's partner, GREGORY POWELL. Equally as old and as weatherbeaten. But a little bantam cock of a man. Just about 5'5" with a pugnacious face and thick white hair. He pays no attention to the conversation between Bratenahl and Donovan . . . keeps his eyes on the board. But we keep him in the shot and know he's listening.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

141 CONTINUED:

The interior of the cabin looks like bachelor digs. Not the shipshape image of a crack naval spaceship of the line we might have expected. It is messy, a bit raunchy, clearly the kind of place where two old men who have been living together for years have developed to accommodate each other's habits and foibles. Clothes lying on the consoles, shoes on the bar, notes pinned with stickum to the bulkheads. But as comfortable as a summer vacation cabin.

Bratenahl pulls a bottle of liquor out of his pouch. He hands it across to Donovan, who purses his lips in pleasure.

BRATENAHL
I brought it all the way from Central as kind of a bribe. It occurred to me it might've been a while since you'd had real bourbon out here.

DONOVAN
A bribe, Mr. Bratenahl. Hmmm, sounds weighty.

BRATENAHL
Well, I didn't think a jar of chocolate syrup would work.

DONOVAN
I beg your pardon?

BRATENAHL
Nothing; just something funny I was remembering. Forget it.

DONOVAN
What I don't understand is why you'd come all the way out here to Kitalpha just to ask us about Susan Calvin.

BRATENAHL
You worked with her; you knew her well.

DONOVAN
(muses)
Worked with her, yes, for many years. But "knew her *well*"? No, I can't say that, can't say that at all. Hardly knew her at all, and *never* understood her.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

141 CONTINUED: – 2

Powell mumbles something from the chess table. Bratenahl looks over. Powell is still staring at the chess pieces.

BRATENAHL
Mr. Powell? Did you say something?

POWELL
(doesn't look up)
Said: meanest human being I ever met.

Donovan smiles slightly, makes a hand-movement in Powell's direction that is intended for Bratenahl, intended to tell Bratenahl to take it with a grain of salt. Bratenahl grins and answers Donovan.

BRATENAHL
Well, I've met her twice now, in a manner of speaking. And I'd say she isn't all that fond of people.

POWELL
She liked robots a damned sight better than people. And no "manner of speaking" about it.

DONOVAN
(ignores him)
Mr. Bratenahl, I'm not sure we can help you much. It's been a good many years since Greg and I have had any company . . . and well, would you excuse us for a few minutes?

Bratenahl nods. Donovan rises. He walks to Powell and puts a hand on his shoulder. Powell looks up, sighs wearily, and knocks over the white king. Then he stands and follows Donovan as they walk out of the saloon cabin and the port sighs shut behind them. Bratenahl looks at Frinkel.

FRINKEL
Can I get you some more coffee, sir?

BRATENAHL
No. Thank you.
(beat)
They seem very sad.

FRINKEL
You'd be sad, too, sir, if the only reason
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

141 CONTINUED: – 3

FRINKEL (CONT'D.)
for living no longer existed.

BRATENAHL
I'm afraid I don't understand.

142 2-SHOT – FRINKEL & BRATENAHL

The rusty robot comes to him and without sitting speaks.

FRINKEL
They're the very last of their kind. The last of the space captains. The teleport booths put them out of business. With instant transportation from world-to-world, who needs something as slow as a faster-than-light spaceship?

BRATENAHL
I can see how they'd feel bitter.

FRINKEL
Can you, sir? I wonder.

Then he begins speaking in *POWELL'S VOICE*. Very clearly and without rustiness, imitating Powell exactly.

FRINKEL (CONT'D.)
(in Powell's voice)
Time was . . . before the booths . . . even a sinkhole like this, way the hell and gone on the edge of the Coalsack, nothin' beyond but empty nothin' . . . time was you'd see a place like this *deep* with ships . . . the big ships . . . the inver-space ships, not a bucket like this one . . . the *big* ships, close together, hundreds of 'em like a stand of spears. Time was.

Bratenahl responds to the misery in the imitation.

BRATENAHL
Then what are they doing out here at the last stop of the booths, with a ship?

FRINKEL
There's still need of *one* ship, sir. This one.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

142 CONTINUED:

FRINKEL (CONT'D.)
(beat)
How do you think the teleport booths get to the next world when there isn't a terminus there already?

BRATENAHL
(softly)
My God. Every booth they plant means they've programmed themselves a little more into obsolescence. It's like self-exile.

FRINKEL
But they do it, sir. They keep right on doing it, because it's all they *can* do. And Central pays no attention to them, just sends through another batch of parts to construct the next booth farther out . . . and they go . . . and they wait for the next jump.

BRATENAHL
(somberly)
God, how useless they must feel.

FRINKEL
Not useless, sir. Not useless . . . just terminal.

The port opens and Donovan and Powell come back in. Powell looks at Frinkel and Bratenahl suspiciously, wondering what they've been talking about. Frinkel goes back to the wall. Donovan and Powell sit down across from Bratenahl.

DONOVAN
Where would you like to start?

BRATENAHL
What do you know about her relationship with Stephen Byerley?

DONOVAN
Not a thing. We were off-planet from 2020 on. Byerley came along maybe fifteen, twenty years later.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

142 CONTINUED: – 2

BRATENAHL
Well, maybe we should start with the first time you worked with her; if you can remember.

POWELL
We remember *every*thing, fellah. Old don't always mean feeble.
(beat)
2022. She was 28. The three of us, and an experimental robot named Speedy, we were the Second Mercury Mining Expedition.

DONOVAN
(puts in as explanation)
In 2018 a first mining expedition had gone to Mercury, built the station and then went bust for a lot of reasons.

143 FULL SHOT – CAMERA COMING DOWN

As the following DIALOGUE PROGRESSES the SCENE DARKENS as if night were descending in the cabin of the spaceship. We will HEAR the VOICES of Donovan and Powell in VOICE OVER. This dialogue will not be filtered or echo-chambered, but straight, as if they are still sitting talking about the past. Except that we will be able to *see* the past as they describe it. CAMERA DOWN past the old men talking to one of the photoreceptor eyes of Frinkel, that glows red and alert. CAMERA INTO THE EYE as DIALOGUE CONTINUES and the scene dims into darkness around them.

POWELL (V.O.)
You know what it's like on Mercury, fellah?

BRATENAHL (V.O.)
Only vaguely. One side is always to the sun . . . hot . . . the other's always turned toward space and it's frigid. Airless.

POWELL (V.O.)
We're talkin' here blood-boilin' *hot*! Afternoon temperature 460° Kelvin . . . what they used to call 368° Fahrenheit. That's Lightside. And as soon as you
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

143 CONTINUED:

POWELL (V.O.) (CONT'D.)
cross to Darkside it drops to 90° Kelvin . . . that's 297° below zero Fahrenheit!

(beat)
Only thing kept that station from meltin' down was an electrostatic field powered by photocell banks that pulled in sunpower. Whole station was just one big energy converter.

SCENE FADES as we ENTER the robot photoreceptor eye of Frinkel . . . as we go INTO THE RED EYE and we HEAR their VOICES FADE but not entirely. And we

DISSOLVE THRU RED TO:

144 INT. MERCURY STATION – FULL SHOT

It is Spartan. A hemispherical metal and plastic dome that curves overhead perhaps ten feet above the heads of two young men whom we recognize as POWELL and DONOVAN in their late twenties or very early thirties. Donovan has just emerged from a porthole in the floor, having come up a ladder we can see through the porthole, from the sublevels below. Powell has apparently been searching for him, because he has just come through a sliding door in one bulkhead, looked around frenziedly, and then caught sight of Donovan coming up out of the deck. He rushes to him as Donovan climbs out. They react to one another vividly as each speaks in an animated fashion. *We do not hear them.* What we HEAR is the PRESENT-TIME VOICES of the group in the spaceship cabin, Scene 143.

DONOVAN (V.O.)
We were sent to Mercury to *make* that failed mining operation work. Calvin came with us to oversee the new SPD 13 robot—what we called Speedy.

(beat)
We were there two days and the photocell banks started to fail. We'd broil alive in about 24 hours.

(beat)
What we needed to get them working again was a measly kilogram of selenium.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POWELL (V.O.)
Seemed easy. There was pools of selenium all over Mercury's Sunside, nearest one only 17 miles away.
(beat)
So we sent out that robot, Speedy, to get what we needed. Seemed easy . . .

During all of the preceding DIALOGUE V.O. the young versions of Powell and Donovan have been arguing, then looking at a map of the surface of Mercury. And during their animated talk a 26-year-old SUSAN CALVIN has come through the sliding door in the bulkhead to join them. At first she has just stood listening to them argue, but now is pointing to the map and forcefully arguing with them. CAMERA has come in on them to show us their faces clearly, and now COMES DOWN on the map between them.

As CAMERA HOLDS on the map, with Powell's hand tracing a pattern, we see the station clearly marked, and the selenium pools around the area also clearly indicated. Circling the nearest selenium pool on the map is a series of dotted *bright red lines* . . . circling the pool four times.

Now we don't hear V.O. but the VOICES of the three people in the scene as CAMERA PULLS BACK AWAY from the map and we have seguéd into the action totally.

POWELL
I sent that damned robot out five hours ago. When he didn't come back I started tracking him by short wave.
(beat)
He's gone crazy!

DONOVAN
Looks like he's *circling* the selenium pool. Instead of going out and picking up what we need and coming right back he goes *close* to the pool, then turns around and starts back for the station . . .

POWELL
But he doesn't go very far. Just starts back for the pool and keeps repeating the runaround, round and round . . . and we're gonna *fry*!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

144 CONTINUED: – 2

CALVIN
You gave him direct orders?

POWELL
(looks at her with dislike)
Of course.

CALVIN
But the Three Laws . . . a robot can't defy the Three Laws.

POWELL
Yeah? Terrific. Meanwhile, we've got to go out on the surface and get Speedy back!

He starts for the porthole in the floor and they follow him.

145 thru 151 SERIES OF MOVING SHOTS – WITH CALVIN & MEN

Down through the port into the underground tunnels beneath the mining station. Through tunnels. Interlocking dogged ports. To a huge storage chamber where we see six enormous early-model robots, giant behemoths, sitting against a wall with their legs straight out before them.

POWELL
These're left over from the First Expedition. If we put on insulated suits we're safe outside for twenty minutes tops. Maybe we can get close enough in that time to call Speedy in.

DONOVAN
Why don't we just send a couple of them out to collect Speedy?

Even seated, the heads of the robots are seven feet in the air. They are surrounded by musty packing cases and the remains of the First Expedition's equipment. We see the three people considering the robots, and Susan Calvin opening the chest console of one of them. Using the leads from a small black service box she locates in the stack of equipment, she manages to insert the atomic pellet that brings the robot to life. It stands, towering high above her.

CALVIN
I'm afraid Powell's right. I know this
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

145 CONTINUED:
thru
151

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
model. An early service type. It has to have a human operator.
(beat)
We'll have to ride them.

And we see the three don the bulky, ugly insulated suits, and activate two other robots, who stand. There is some hurried preparation, then the robots make stirrup with their hands, and each of the three humans places a foot in the hands and swings upward. There is a seat built into the enormous shoulder of each robot, formed by a hump on the back and a shallow depression. The ears serve as handles. There they sit up there, and then the robots turn, as the three humans put on the helmets.
The three huge robots are maneuvered close together, as CAMERA COMES IN CLOSE on Powell, who is pointing to the terminus of a tunnel indicated on the map. It is near one of the indicated selenium pools . . . the one with the red dotted lines around it. We HEAR HIS VOICE FILTER:

POWELL (FILTER)
The tunnel comes out on the surface three miles from the pool Speedy's circling.

They start off down through the chamber to a high doorway portal. It slides open as they approach. The robots go right through and the three people duck just in time to avoid getting their heads cracked open. CAMERA THRU the portal, which sighs shut behind them. Now we are in an underground tunnel lit only by the headlight eyes of the three giant robots. We move down the tunnel.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
I can't figure it out. Heat doesn't mean anything to him; he's built for the light gravity and the broken ground. He should be foolproof.

They come to the end of the tunnel. The robots stop. They are in a tiny substation: empty, airless, ruined. Donovan flashes a small light around, examining a huge rent in an upper wall. Then at a signal from Powell, the door in the substation wall slides up, and the room is flooded with sudden light. And we are looking at the surface of MERCURY.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

145 CONTINUED: – 2
thru
151 (CONT'D.)

A towering cliff of black, basaltic rock cuts off the most killing aspects of the sunlight, and the deep night shadow of an airless world surrounds them. Before them, the shadow reaches out and ends in knife-edge abruptness at an all-but-unbearable blaze of white light that glitters from myriad crystals along a cratered, rocky surface.

POWELL (FILTER)
It looks like snow!

As the substation door has slid up, they have flipped down a series of light filters over their helmets.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
The temperature is over 300° Fahrenheit.

Powell adjusts a binocular attachment to his helmet: it gives him the eyestalked look of a snail.

CUT TO:

152 VIEW THROUGH POWELL'S VISIPLATE – HIS POV

It is a view TINGED WITH PINK and made viewable by filters. We see a dark spot on the horizon, about three miles away, that is the selenium pool.

POWELL (FILTER)
There's a dark spot on the horizon. Could be the selenium pool. But I don't see Speedy.

Then, we see something moving from the horizon line toward us. It catches the sunlight and throws a spark of bright reflection. The overlay imprint in the binocular attachment suddenly throws a green target across the scene, and zeroes in on the moving speck.

POWELL (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
I think . . . I think . . . yes! Damn him, there he is! Coming this way fast!

CUT TO:

153 FULL SHOT – THE TRIO

standing in the shadow of the cliff, three human beings in bulky white insulation suits and weird helmets, one of them eyestalked like a snail, high up like humps on the backs of giant, rudimentary-looking robots who stand with legs spread for balance. Now Donovan points in the direction of the moving dot.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

153 CONTINUED:

DONOVAN (FILTER)
I see him! Let's move it!

He thumps his heels spur-fashion and yells in his helmet.

DONOVAN (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
Giddy-ap!

CAMERA FOLLOWS AND STAYS WITH THEM as the robots move off at a steady pace.

DONOVAN (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
Faster!

POWELL (FILTER)
No use! These junk heaps are only geared to one speed.

Suddenly they burst out of the shadow and the sunlight comes down in a white-hot lava flow around them. All this time Susan Calvin has been silent. By her very silence she has become a strange sort of focus for our attention. She rides her robot with grace, but silently.

154 ZOOM SHOT – TOWARD HORIZON – ON SPEEDY

As CAMERA ZOOMS IN on him, we see the SPD-13 robot loping toward us easily, as though happily at home in the burning hell of Mercury's wasteland. WE MUST *FEEL* WHAT 400° F. FEELS LIKE!! He is sleek, futuristic, graceful, an earlier ancester of Frinkel but as advanced over the robots the humans are riding as a Maserati or Porsche is advanced over a Stanley Steamer. He's coming fast, throwing off a whole shower of sunlight sunbursts from his reflective skin.

155 REVERSE ANGLE – FROM DONOVAN'S PERCH

high on his robot. Now Speedy can be seen clearly with the naked eye. Coming on toward them fast, fast, fast! Donovan waves wildly.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Hey, Speedy! Hey, baby!

POWELL (FILTER)
That's it, Speedy honey . . . come on you little devil! Move-a you ass!

156 CU – SUSAN CALVIN

watching. There is something in her face, seen through the filtering mechanisms of the visiplate, that tells us she isn't as jubilant as Powell and Donovan. But still she's silent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

157 FULL SHOT – ACROSS THE SCENE

SHOWING the space between the trio and Speedy being cut down rapidly, mostly by Speedy's rush forward. We can see from this perspective just how plodding the older robots are, and how Speedy could run rings around them.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Put all the juice you've got into that radio sender, Greg! He doesn't see us yet.

158 VIEW FROM POWELL'S PERCH – TO SPEEDY

At that moment we perceive that Speedy is running with a lopsided, rolling, staggering, side-to-side lurch. And Speedy looks up, sees them, and comes screeching to a halt, almost vibrating at attention like a Road Runner cartoon.

POWELL (FILTER)
'Atza baby! Now you got it, Speedy! Come on, fellah, come here.

159 CU – SPEEDY

as he stares at them. And now we HEAR his VOICE in the intercom FILTER OVER for the first time.

SPEEDY (FILTER)
(metallic, and a little crazy)
Hot dog, let's play games! You catch me and I catch you; no love can cut our knife in two. For I'm Little Buttercup, sweet Little Buttercup. Whooops!

He sounds as though he's hiccuping.

And he turns and dashes off in the direction from which he just came. Running like a crazed sonofabitch, almost a blur of white lightning. Just shooooosh! and gone!

160 ON THE TRIO

as they stare after him.

POWELL (FILTER)
Well, I'll be damned and roasted and drip-poured.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
(screaming)
You stupid, eggsucking, miserable pile of fucking *junk*! Goddamit, get your ass *back* here!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

160 CONTINUED:

Then silence. Then, after several beats, they both turn and stare at Susan Calvin. They give up.

CALVIN (FILTER)
(calmly)
Let's go back to the cliff before we burn out the units.

She turns her robot, holding its ears, and starts back across to the huge black cliff. They stare after her for a moment, then follow.

DISSOLVE TO:

161 SHADOW OF THE CLIFF – ON THE TRIO

as they sit, having dismounted, in the deep shadow. Only the headlight eyes of the robots, shining down on them from above, eerily, illuminate them at all.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Where'd he pick up the Gilbert and Sullivan . . . he's drunk, that's what he is, drunk out of his positronic skull!

CALVIN (FILTER)
Not drunk. At least not in the human sense.

POWELL (FILTER)
Well, *some*thing's sure as hell wrong with him.

CALVIN (FILTER)
Might I impose on you to curb your language, Mr. Powell?

Powell and Donovan look at each other, astounded.

POWELL (FILTER)
I don't fuckin' be*lieve* you, Calvin! We're sitting on our asses on the surface of Mercury, fifty-seven million miles from Earth, about to be righteously *cremated* because that piece of shit robot you helped design is trying to run up its own asshole . . . *and you don't like my language!!!*

(beat)
Well, I'm scared out of my mind, you god-
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

161 CONTINUED:

POWELL (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
dam idiot! Maybe you'll stay so fuckin' cool you'll watch Mike and me burn to death and then you'll just *walk* home . . . but *I'm* scared, dammit, I'm bloody terrified!

Donovan slides over and gives Powell's helmet a hard, sharp slam against the basalt wall. Powell's head rings inside the helmet. But his hysteria dries up. He doesn't cry, but he's breathing heavily, trying to control himself.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
(calmly)
He's sorry, Dr. Calvin.

CALVIN (FILTER)
I understand. Now let's think.

She sits back in silence. Thinking.

162 ANOTHER ANGLE – FAVORING CALVIN

After a few moments Donovan slides over and holds Powell, who seems to be shivering. In a few beats it's all right, and he lets him go. They watch Calvin. Then . . .

CALVIN (FILTER)
Speedy is perfectly adapted to normal Mercurian environment according to the records of the First Expedition. But this area . . .
(she sweeps a hand around)
. . . is definitely abnormal.
(beat)
That's our clue.

The "area" she indicates is brightly-lit from the crystals that litter the ground, reflecting back the blazing sunlight.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
You mean these crystals. Okay, where do they come from? They might have formed from a slowly cooling liquid . . . but where would you get liquid so hot that it would cool in Mercury's sun?

There is snuffling from Powell, then a gulping sound as he gets hold of himself totally.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

162 CONTINUED:

POWELL (FILTER)
Volcanic action?

Calvin sits up straighter, looks at Powell sharply.

CALVIN (FILTER)
Very good, Mr. Powell.
(beat)
What did you say to Speedy when you sent him for the selenium?

POWELL (FILTER)
I don't remember exactly. I just told him to get it.

CALVIN (FILTER)
(sharply)
I'm afraid I'll need to know *exactly* what you said . . . and how you said it.

POWELL (FILTER)
I said, uh, "Speedy, we need some selenium. You can get it such and such a place. Go get it." That's all. What more did you *want* me to say?

CALVIN (FILTER)
You didn't put any urgency in it?

POWELL (FILTER)
What for? It was pure routine.

Susan Calvin rises. She walks away from them, hands clasped behind her back, thinking. Finally, without turning:

CALVIN (FILTER)
In this case we may have departed from routine in a way that has killed us, Mr. Powell.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
You know what's wrong?

CALVIN (FILTER)
I think I do . . . yes.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Well, let's have it.

She turns and walks back to them.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CALVIN (FILTER)
It goes directly to the Three Laws of Robotics . . . as it always does.
(she counts on her fingers)
One: a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

POWELL (FILTER)
(picks it up)
Two: a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

CALVIN (FILTER)
(on third finger)
And three: a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection doesn't conflict with the First and Second Laws.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Right! Now where are we?

CALVIN (FILTER)
Exactly at the explanation.
(beat)
Say the robot is walking into danger and knows it. Rule Three turns him back. But suppose you *ordered* him into that danger? In that case, the Second Law sets up a counterpotential higher than the previous one and he follows orders at the risk of his existence.
(beat)
In the case of Speedy, the latest most expensive robot ever created, as valuable as a fleet of battleships, the Third Law—self-preservation—has been strengthened. So his allergy to danger is unusually high.

POWELL (FILTER)
(slaps himself)
And to make it worse, when I sent him
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POWELL (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
out into danger, I gave him the order casually so the potential of the Second Law was rather weak.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
I think I get it . . . and I hate it a lot.
(beat)
There's some sort of danger centering at the selenium pool. It increases as he approaches, and at a certain distance from it Law Three drives him back until he hits a point of equilibrium, then Law Two drives him forward—

CALVIN (FILTER)
(nods)
So he follows a circle around the selenium pool, staying on the locus of all points of potential equilibrium. And unless we do something about it, he'll stay on that circle forever. And that's what's making him seem drunk. Half the positronic paths in his brain are out of kilter.

POWELL (FILTER)
But what's he running *from*?

CALVIN (FILTER)
You suggested it yourself. Volcanic action. Somewhere right above the selenium pool is a seepage of gas from the bowels of Mercury. Sulphur dioxide, carbon dioxide . . . and carbon monoxide. Lots of it—at this temperature.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Oh my God.

POWELL (FILTER)
What? What the hell *is* it?!?

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Carbon monoxide plus iron gives the volatile iron carbonyl. And a robot is essentially iron.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

162 CONTINUED: – 4

Powell slumps down in the shadow farther. The robot's eyes move to pick him up again in the darkness.

POWELL (FILTER)
We can't get the selenium ourselves. Too far, the suits would burn out. We can't send these robots because they can't go without Daddy riding along . . . and they can't carry us fast enough to get it before we fry. And we can't catch Speedy because the clown thinks we're playing games and he can run sixty miles to our four.

CALVIN (FILTER)
There's one thing more . . .
(beat)
There's a high concentration of carbon monoxide in the metal-vapor atmosphere, considerable corrosive action. He's been out for hours. He was lurching. I think a knee-joint is going out.
(beat)
He'll be keeling over soon, and then *nothing* we can do will help. We have to think very creatively, gentlemen, and we have to think very, *very* fast.

HOLD on their terrified faces as we

DISSOLVE TO:

163 CLOSE ON POWELL'S FACE

Terrified, hopeless, through the helmet. He looks to his left and CAMERA GOES WITH to pick up Donovan. Equally as lost. They know they're dead, and Donovan says it.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Maybe another fifteen minutes, then we have to go back in. And that's it.

POWELL (FILTER)
Well, Calvin? Any ideas? Any bright new ideas? You're the one who knows how these suckers think!

He looks to his right. We cannot see Susan Calvin. Or her robot.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

163 CONTINUED:

POWELL (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
Calvin? Where are you? I can't see you.

He gets up. Gently feels his way around in the darkness.

POWELL (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
(to his robot)
Hey you, dummy . . . swing your beams around here.

The robot shines his eyes around. The beams slip like oil across the dark rock. No Calvin, no robot.

POWELL (FILTER) (CONT'D.)
(alarmed)
Mike! She's gone!

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Dr. Calvin? Dr. Calvin, where are you?
(to Powell)
How the hell did she slip away?

POWELL (FILTER)
Turned off her radio, of course.

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Dr. Calvin! Please answer us!

POWELL (FILTER)
Lousy bitch . . .
(screams in radio)
No escape, Calvin! You're gonna fry the same as us, you lousy run-out!

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Jesus, shut up, Greg! Something's happened to her . . . she's not stupid . . . she didn't run out on us . . .
(beat)
Dr. Calvin! Answer us! Please!

There is a crackling SOUND OVER and then the VOICE of Susan Calvin comes to them.

CALVIN (FILTER)
There's always the First Law, gentlemen. Two and Three simply cannot stand against it. I thought of it earlier . . .

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

163 CONTINUED: – 2

DONOVAN (FILTER)
Oh my God! Dr. Calvin . . . ! Come back!

POWELL (FILTER)
No! Oh, Christ, Mike . . . she's not . . .

CALVIN (FILTER)
I'm already too far out for you to help. I'll leave the radio open.

CUT TO:

164 SUN-DRENCHED LANDSCAPE – ON CALVIN & ROBOT

as the robot lopes steadily out toward the selenium pool. We can see the basalt cliff far in the b.g. now. And we understand that Susan Calvin has come much farther than the group progressed earlier.

165 PAST CALVIN TO HORIZON

Here comes Speedy. Loping smugly toward her, lurching a lot worse than before. But coming on steadily.

SPEEDY (FILTER)
(metallic and crazier)
Here we are again. Wheee! I've made a little list, the piano organist; all people who eat peppermint and puff it in your face . . .

She's much closer now as Speedy comes near. He stops. He wavers, wobbles, takes a step backward.

CALVIN (FILTER)
There's an itching down my back. It's probably my imagination . . . but it may be hard radiation through the suit —getting to me already. Hello, Speedy.

166 PAST SPEEDY TO CALVIN

There is a large distance between them, but Susan has managed to get closer than the previous time. Susan's robot has stopped. But Speedy is backing up very slowly, step by step.

SPEEDY (FILTER)
. . . and I polished all the bearings in the Queen's nave-eeee . . .
(but querulously)
Tippy-tippy-tin, here we go agin . . .

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

166 CONTINUED:

He stares as Susan Calvin, 300 yards away, jumps from the robot's shoulder, landing on the crystalline ground with a light thump and a flying of jagged fragments. She starts toward Speedy on foot, the ground gritty and slippery as she walks unsteadily toward him. Speedy backs up. Susan closes by thirty yards, then stops.

CALVIN (FILTER)
Speedy! Look at me, Speedy. I've got to get back to the shadow or the sun will kill me. It's life or death, Speedy. I need you.
(beat)
Help me, Speedy!

Speedy takes one step forward, then stops.

SPEEDY (FILTER)
(uncertainly)
When you're lying awake, with a dismal headache and repose is tabooed . . .

HARD CUT TO:

167 CU – CALVIN'S FACE THROUGH HELMET

DONOVAN (FILTER)
It's no good, Dr. Calvin. He's reciting "Iolanthe" now. Come back . . . maybe we can . . .

CALVIN (FILTER)
No . . . too late . . . roasting . . .

Then we see that she sees something from the corner of her eye and as she turns CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS and Susan lurches dizzily, throwing out her arms to steady herself as we see the giant robot on which she is riding moving toward her . . . without a rider.

ROBOT (FILTER)
Pardon, Master. I must not move without a Master on me, but you are in danger.

Calvin backs away, motioning frantically.

CALVIN (FILTER)
I order you to stop! I *order* you to stop!

She staggers, throws up her hand over her helmet. The heat is starting to get through the insulated suit. She weaves dizzily.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

167 CONTINUED:

ROBOT (FILTER)
You are in danger, Master.

CLOSE ON CALVIN. Moisture on the inside of the helmet plate now. We HEAR the hideous rasping of her dying breath, the gasping as she is being cooked. She falls to one knee, dizzy.

CALVIN (FILTER)
Speedy! I'm dying . . . oh God, Speedy . . . *help* me, please help me.

CAMERA CLOSE so we see the huge feet of the robot behind her, coming closer. Now Susan is crawling toward Speedy on hands and knees, dying with every movement. She falls over and the CAMERA COMES IN TIGHT on her head and shoulders just as steel fingers close on her suit.

SPEEDY (FILTER)
(sane)
Holy smokes, boss, what are you doing here? And what am *I* doing . . . I'm so confused . . .

CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS and we see that it is Speedy, not the behemoth robot that has gotten to her first. She looks up into Speedy's metal face and smiles in the helmet.

CALVIN (FILTER)
(barely whispers)
It's all right, Speedy. G-get me to the shadow of the cliff . . . please hur . . .

CUT TO:

168 CALVIN'S POV – THROUGH HELMET PLATE

Through the mist moisture, the rasping of breath.

CALVIN (FILTER)
. . . ry . . . hurry . . .

Everything goes milky-white with water vapor and moisture as she faints and CAMERA GOES INTO THE MIST . . .

DISSOLVE TO:

169 SAME AS 141

In the darkness of the spaceship cabin broken by blasts of lightning outside, Bratenahl sits with the aged versions of Donovan and Powell, and the robot amenuensis, Frinkel. A few lights strobe on

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

169 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

the control board, illuminating their faces in green and red and silver.

POWELL

Sent Speedy back out to one of the other selenium pools with urgent orders to get the selenium at *all costs.*

DONOVAN

He was back in forty-two minutes and three seconds. I timed him.

(beat, softly)

Susan Calvin.

BRATENAHL

How badly was she burned . . . ?

POWELL

(quiet now)

I don't think *I* could've taken it.

They sit silently for a few beats. Then:

BRATENAHL

Help me talk to her.

DONOVAN

We can't help. Old men hanging on. What kind of help could we give?

POWELL

She never liked us. Don't much blame her; we were smartasses in them days.

BRATENAHL

Please help me. You've told me a side of her no one knows. The world *should* know. It's important.

DONOVAN

(to Powell)

Greg, you tired?

POWELL

Sleep's a good idea. Busy day tomorrow.

They rise and start to move toward their berths. The robot assists Bratenahl to his feet.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

169 CONTINUED: – 2

FRINKEL
I'll see you to the port, sir.

BRATENAHL
(a little urgently)
I'll be on Sigma Draconis 5. Central can find me . . . if you want to help . . .

They disappear into the darkness of the spaceship and the robot leads Bratenahl gently, but firmly, to the port. As Bratenahl steps into the descender, Frinkel looks at him.

FRINKEL
They're tired, sir. Very tired. It must be terrible to live beyond one's time. I don't really comprehend the concept, but I feel their pain.

Bratenahl looks at the robot, and then the descender begins to lower, carrying him with it. Bratenahl flips the lightning-rod crown on his head. The last thing he sees as the threshold of the port rises up in FRAME is the robot standing there, his posture eliciting sympathy.

DISSOLVE TO:

170 THE CRYONIC CRYPTS UNDER SIGMA DRACONIS 5

Enormous caverns of shimmering plastic and steel. They stretch up into the distance. We see two figures walking down the two-lane-highway–wide corridor. On every side are crypt enclosures. The figures are dwarfed. We must get a sense of incredible height and size to this chamber. CAMERA DOWN till we pick up the SOUND of the footsteps of the two people. CAMERA DOWN SMOOTHLY to show us it is Bernice and Bratenahl. They are walking among the crypts where humans and aliens are frozen. Bernice carries a small device that beeps and strobes a red light.

BERNICE
This took every favor I had on call.

BRATENAHL
Thanks.

He is moody. Almost locked into silence. She looks at him worriedly.

BERNICE
You look sicker than hell.

CAMERA WITH THEM as they walk down the enormous corridor.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

170 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

Thousands of sleeping, frozen shapes can be dimly seen through the quartz-crystal fronts of the crypts set into the metal walls, one next to another on into infinity, rising up, tier after tier into the vaulted distance. Their echoing footsteps the only sounds accompanying their hushed voices.

BRATENAHL

I think I'm going to lose.

BERNICE

Lose what, Bob? That's what I want to know: lose what? Rowe will take you back.

BRATENAHL

I don't care about that any more.

BERNICE

What kind of a hold has Susan Calvin *got* on you?

BRATENAHL

I can't name it. But I don't want to lose. Don't ask me for sense out of this. I keep running the tapes of her and Byerley together . . . over and over . . . there's something there . . . I just can't see it.

BERNICE

(wearily)

Who is this Bogert?

BRATENAHL

Norman Bogert. Head mathematician for U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men. Worked with Calvin for years, succeeded Alfred Lanning as chief executive of RoboMek.

BERNICE

He's been frozen for twenty-two years. What can he do?

BRATENAHL

Donovan and Powell mentioned some vague rumor they'd heard about a romance Susan Calvin had had . . . maybe Bogert can give me a clue. He was closest to her.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

170 CONTINUED: – 2

BERNICE
(looks at beeper)
Here. Tier fifteen.

She punches in a code and there is a whining sound of smooth machinery above them. They look far up into the distance and one of the crypts is extended on runners. Extensible arms grip the crypt and begin to lower it. As it comes down, Bernice stares at Bratenahl worriedly.

171 2-SHOT – MED. CLOSE

as Bernice turns him toward her.

BERNICE
(earnest)
You know, it might be nice to get to a time when I could care about you.

BRATENAHL
Maybe later.

BERNICE
Maybe there won't be enough later to work with, Bob.

BRATENAHL
I can't think about anything else now.

BERNICE
You never have. If not this, then a shipwreck on a lava sea on 30 Cassiopeia Iota, a begoon hunt on Carina Avoir 9 . . .

BRATENAHL
The crypt's coming down.

She sighs, takes her hand off his arm, resigns herself. The crypt comes down to floor level. They look in. There is a readout panel on the face of the quartz port. She keys it with the beeper device.

BERNICE
Cancer of the lymph glands. Frozen in advanced stage. Short of total parts replacement we'll never be able to unfreeze him.

BRATENAHL
Can I talk to him?

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

171 CONTINUED:

BERNICE
Psych-probe into the hypothalamus. He'll wake enough so you can talk to the alpha-state consciousness.
(beat)
Here, you'll need an ear-plug.

She hands him a tiny device. He puts it in his ear, hooking the fastener over his outer ear. She keys him in. There is a series of *electronic* SOUNDS OVER. He stares into the crypt at the sleeping man within. CAMERA PAST HIM to crypt.

172 DOLLY IN ON CRYPT

Through the quartz crystal port we can see quite clearly the body of a naked, sleeping man. NORMAN BOGERT was frozen when he was in his late fifties. His face is lean and feral, and his hair has miraculously escaped graying. It is sleek and black, flattened against his skull. His eyes are closed, his thin, full mouth tightly shut. CAMERA IN CLOSE as the strange electronic sounds continue in sequence. Then we HEAR an echoing VOICE, as if speaking from a wind-tunnel. The sound of Arctic winds in the b.g. Close to the voice so we hear the faintly bronchial hissing as each breath is taken.

BOGERT (ECHO)
Calling my name . . . down a long tunnel . . . over and over . . .
(beat)
A moment . . . I'm . . . am I awake . . . ?

BRATENAHL (O.S.)
Mr. Bogert. You're still sleeping. I've tapped in to talk to you.

BOGERT (ECHO)
Who is that? Are you *up there*? I can't see you.

BRATENAHL (O.S.)
My name is Robert Bratenahl. I'm a newsman for *Cosmos*. I've come to ask you about Susan Calvin.

BOGERT (ECHO)
Then I'm still dying. You woke me for
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

172 CONTINUED:

BOGERT (ECHO) (CONT'D.)
this . . . *how* did you wake me . . . ? Am I dreaming this?

BRATENAHL (O.S.)
We've tapped into your unconscious, sir. It's quite important. I hope you can help me.

173 FULL SHOT

The entire cryonic complex, enormous, off in all directions. And two small figures down there, talking to the crypt. CAMERA COMES DOWN STEADILY as we HEAR the VOICE OVER.

BOGERT (ECHO)
(testily)
I don't want to talk to you. I take this as an imposition, really quite selfish of you, Mr. Whomever-You-Are.

BRATENAHL
But you were very close with Dr. Calvin through the important years of—

BOGERT (ECHO)
No one was close with Susan Calvin. No one and nothing but her beloved robots.
(beat)
Go away. Let me alone. I have dreams to dream.

BRATENAHL
(cagily)
Aren't you curious about what's gone on in the world since you were frozen?

BOGERT (ECHO)
Have you ever been in deep sleep?

BRATENAHL
No, sir.

BOGERT (ECHO)
Then let me tell you, the chief concern is with one's self. I have discovered many significant things about myself.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOGERT (ECHO) (CONT'D.)
(beat)
Why, just a short time ago . . . I *think* it was just a short time ago . . . I finally unearthed the reason I despise broccoli.

BRATENAHL
(frustrated)
Don't you want to know about the big development in teleportation?

BOGERT (ECHO)
(interested now)
You're kidding? They finally did it? Breakthrough from the interstellar spaceship drive we discovered, right?

BRATENAHL
Talk to me about Dr. Calvin and I'll fill you in on everything you want to know.

BOGERT (ECHO)
Coercing a helpless subconscious is unseemly, Mr. Whatsyourname.

BRATENAHL
Robert Bratenahl. Not coercion, just a little back-fence gossip.

CAMERA HAS COME DOWN to a TIGHT 3-SHOT of crypt, Bernice and Bratenahl. She touches his arm, indicates she's going away to leave them alone. He nods half-abstractedly, fascinated by the mind that speaks from the cryonic freezer. She goes. Bratenahl leans against the crypt so his face is close to the quartz portal.

BOGERT (ECHO)
(delighted)
Oh, well! That's quite a different matter. I must confess I'm a trifle bored. Precisely what about Susan do you wish to know . . .
(beat)
By the way: she's still alive, isn't she?

BRATENAHL
Yes, of course. Would you like to know what year it is now, how long you've been frozen?

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

173 CONTINUED: – 2

BOGERT (ECHO)
Don't depress me. Unless I'm about to be thawed, I'd as lief not know.

BRATENAHL
I'm afraid not, sir.

BOGERT (ECHO)
Then kindly keep the dreary knowledge to yourself. Now. What particular information about the good Doctor art thou seeking?

BRATENAHL
Do you remember Donovan and Powell? Troubleshooters for U.S. Robots?

BOGERT (ECHO)
Are *they* still around?

BRATENAHL
Barely.
(beat)
They passed on a remark about Dr. Calvin having had an affair with someone back around 2028. Could that have been Stephen Byerley?

BOGERT (ECHO)
(laughs raucously)
Oh, my lord. You're not *serious*, are you? Byerley? The President? How silly.

174 CLOSE ON BRATENAHL & BOGERT IN CRYPT

BRATENAHL
Well, there's always been this underground rumor . . .

BOGERT (ECHO)
A misanthrope. Robots were her passion.
(beat)
Except . . . once . . .

BRATENAHL
The time I asked about?

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

174 CONTINUED:

BOGERT (ECHO)
(slowly, thoughtfully)
Ye-es . . . his name was Milton Ashe. He was . . .

BRATENAHL
Tell me.

BOGERT (ECHO)
He was the youngest officer of the corporation. Slim, ascetic-looking chap. Nice enough, I suppose; though I always had the feeling he wanted my job. Didn't get it, but . . .

BRATENAHL
But Susan Calvin was interested in him?

BOGERT (ECHO)
Well, I think so. I never really found out what happened; not the specifics, you know. It started with the mind-reading robot, Herbie . . .

BRATENAHL
The *what*?

BOGERT (ECHO)
Oh, yes, of course. You couldn't possibly know about Herbie. He only happened once, but it was pretty sticky for a while . . .
(beat)
I was . . .

As he speaks his VOICE ECHOES LOUDER AND LOUDER, the words *I Was* repeating OVER AND OVER as though down a tunnel and sonically altering so they have a drawn-out doppler effect. As this happens CAMERA MOVES IN on the sleeping face to EXTREME CU and we

MATCH-CUT TO:

175 EXTREME CU – BOGERT'S FACE

But it is a younger Bogert, age 31. We see now the punctilious, more than slightly prissy Bogert of 2028, hair slicked back, thin lips pursed. CAMERA PULLS BACK from the MATCH-CUT TO
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

175 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

HIS FACE and there stand three other people: Susan Calvin, age 34, the aged Alfred Lanning whom we saw in Scenes 55–59, and a younger man who, from the description just given in Scene 174, must be MILTON ASHE. He is wiry, good-looking in an ascetic way, a kind of wry humor about him. A friendly sort of young man. All four of them are standing in a "blue-light room" looking through a heavy one-way glass panel at a robot sitting and reading a book. The robot is HERBIE, much more sophisticated-looking than the Speedy robot of earlier, but not yet as sleek as the robots we've seen in present time. And Bogert is speaking, though all we HEAR OVER is a continuation of the echoing words *I was* . . . which synchronize with his lips as he says:

BOGERT

I was taking him down to the testing rooms myself. Obermann was off somewhere. And I wasn't speaking, I was *thinking* about the renewal of my aircar insurance and trying to remember what the expiration date was, and the robot looked at me and said, "It's the 15th of this month."

LANNING

(lights a cigar)

It reads minds all right. Damn little doubt about that; what you've told us only reinforces the tests.

(beat)

But *how? Why?*

BOGERT

That was the 34th RB model we've turned out. All the others were strictly orthodox.

ASHE

Listen, Bogert. There wasn't a hitch in the assembly from start to finish. I guarantee that.

BOGERT

(fussily)

Do you indeed? If you can answer for the entire assembly line, I recommend your

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOGERT (CONT'D.)
promotion. By exact count, there are seventy-five thousand, two hundred and thirty-four operations necessary for the manufacture of a single positronic brain, each separate operation depending for successful completion upon any number of factors, from five to one hundred and five. If any one of them goes seriously wrong, the brain is ruined.

CALVIN
Arguing, trying to fix blame avails us nothing, gentlemen. We've produced a positronic brain of supposedly ordinary vintage that has the remarkable ability to tune in on thought waves. We don't know how it happened, but we *must* find out. *That's* the sum total of the problem.

LANNING
Calvin's right. And we have to keep it a secret among the four of us. If any word leaks out about a robot that can read minds, I hate to think what Soldash and the Church could do with it. A return of the pogroms!

BOGERT
I suggest we destroy it at once.

Through the window, the robot moves his head only the merest fraction. Susan sees the movement, wrinkles her brow, but says nothing. The others are looking the other way and don't see it.

LANNING
Don't be an ass, Norman.
(beat)
All right! We go about this thing systematically. Ashe, I want you to check the assembly line from beginning to end —everything.

ASHE
(puckishly)
All seventy-five thousand, two hundred
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ASHE (CONT'D.)
and thirty-four operations? I is gonna be a busy widdle kid.

BOGERT
(primly)
Ashe!

But Susan lets the faintest tickle of a smile—the first we've seen from her—cross her thin lips. She is looking at Milton Ashe with a twinkle in her eyes, we now perceive.

LANNING
(to Calvin)
You'll tackle the job from the other end. You're the chief robopsychologist at the plant, so you study Herbie and find out how he ticks. See what else is tied up with his telepathic powers, how far they extend, how they warp his outlook, and just exactly what harm it's done to his ordinary RB properties.

Susan nods. Still watching Ashe, who seems amused by all this flapping and worry.

LANNING (CONT'D.)
Norman and I will coordinate your work and interpret the findings mathematically.

Ashe turns and starts to walk away. He holds open the door to the "blue-light room."

ASHE
Be seein' ya in a million years or so.
(to Calvin, in a Humphrey Bogart voice)
And I'll be sheein' *you*, shweetheart.

She smiles lightly. He goes. Bogert purses his lips.

BOGERT
He's too flippant. Doesn't see the seriousness of this; if there's a leak, he'll be the one.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

175 CONTINUED: – 4

CALVIN
I doubt it. He's very good at his job. And he's dedicated.

Lanning gives her a sharp look; Bogert's mouth purses again and we see that he suspects her interest in Ashe.

Lanning and Bogert leave the room. Calvin stares at the robot, still sitting there and reading, for a long moment. Then she presses an interlock panel on the door set into the thick wall beside the panel of glass, and the door sighs open like a bank vault. She walks through.

176 INT. STUDY ROOM – ON HERBIE

The room is white, with two chairs in it. As Susan comes in, Herbie's photoelectric eyes lift from the book. He stands as she enters.

CALVIN
How is the study of hyperatomic motors coming, Herbie?

The robot's voice is level and controlled, very sane and coolly humanoid.

HERBIE
I know why you've had me studying these, Dr. Calvin.

CALVIN
I was afraid you would, Herbie. It's difficult to work with you. You're always one step ahead of me.

HERBIE
There's nothing in your textbooks that interests me. It's all so incredibly simple that it's scarcely worth bothering about.

CALVIN
(quietly)
But it's a science that created you, Herbie.

He waves away her comment with a massive metal hand.

HERBIE
It's your fiction that interests me. Dickens, Dostoevski, the Brontë sisters, Mary Shelley.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

176 CONTINUED:

CALVIN
(ruefully)
Yes, I should imagine you'd find "Frankenstein" fascinating.

HERBIE
(ignores the jab)
What fascinates me are your studies of the interplay of human motives and emotions . . .
(beat)
I see into your minds . . . your novels help.

CALVIN
Yes, but I'm afraid that after going through that cheap melodrama . . .
(bitterly)
. . . you find real minds like ours dull and colorless.

HERBIE
(exuberantly)
But I don't!!!

The sudden energy of his response startles her, brings her back a step. She tries to regain herself, her hand going to her temple, as if she *knows* he's reading her mind.

HERBIE (CONT'D.)
(confidentially)
But of course I know about it, Dr. Calvin. You think about him always, so how can I help but know. Your love, your hope, your pain. It's very much like the thought of hunger I get around the technicians at lunchtime.

She hides her face, turning away from him. Her back then stiffens. She turns back to him. She sits down.

CALVIN
Sit down, Herbie.

He sits.

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
You, uh, you haven't told this to anyone, have you?

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HERBIE
(surprised)
Of course not. No one has asked me.

CALVIN
(blushing)
I suppose you think I'm a fool . . . ?

HERBIE
No, it's a normal emotion.

CALVIN
For others, perhaps. I'm not what you'd call . . . attractive.

HERBIE
If you are referring to mere physical attraction, I haven't the frame of aesthetic values to judge. But I know there are other types of attraction.

CALVIN
(as if she hasn't heard)
Not young . . .
(beat)
And he's twenty-seven and looks and acts younger. He laughs with some of the other women in the plant . . . I see him sometimes . . .
(beat)
Do you suppose he ever sees me as anything but . . . but what I am?

Herbie slams his metal palm down with a ringing clang on the book in his lap. She jumps at his vehemence.

HERBIE
You are wrong! Listen to me—

CALVIN
(with uncharacteristic passion)
Why should I? What do you know about it, anyway, you . . . you *machine*? I'm just a specimen to you, an interesting bug with my mind laid open like an autopsy. Why are you playing "advice to the lovelorn" with me? Do I amuse you?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

176 CONTINUED: – 3

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
(she sobs)
I'm a wonderful experiment in misery and frustration, aren't I?

Herbie hangs his head. He looks away. Susan is suddenly contrite.

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
I . . . I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—
(beat)
I've never felt like this before and I don't know what to do with myself, where to go, how to act, where I should put my hands . . .

HERBIE
(softly)
Won't you listen to me, please? I can help you if you'll let me?

CALVIN
(cold, bitter)
How? By giving me good advice straight from the tin can's mouth?

HERBIE
No, not that. It's just that I know what other people think . . . Mr. Milton Ashe, for instance.

Her eyes drop at mention of Ashe's name. She speaks in a dull monotone.

CALVIN
I don't want to know what he thinks. Keep quiet.

HERBIE
I think you *would* like to know what he thinks.

CALVIN
You're talking nonsense. He doesn't think of me at all.

HERBIE
You're wrong. Mr. Milton Ashe's thoughts of you—

CALVIN
Shut up! I'm ordering you to shut up. That's Second Law!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

176 CONTINUED: – 4

The robot shuts up. They sit for a few seconds. Then she heaves herself from the chair, walks around the white room, hands clasped behind her back. Finally she comes back and stands over him. He looks up at her with his photoelectric eyes. There are tears in her eyes.

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
(softly)
What does he think of me?

HERBIE
(quietly)
He loves you.

177 EXTREME CU – SUSAN CALVIN – HER EYES

widening alarmingly. CAMERA PULLS BACK FAST as she stumbles out of her chair, staggers to the wall as if faint, and holds on to the wall to support herself. Herbie rises to help.

HERBIE
Let me help you . . .

She waves him away. It is a hand-movement that says let me alone for a moment; I'll be all right. He goes back and sits down on the metal-frame chair, hands lying on his knees.

178 DOWN-ANGLE – SHOT FROM ABOVE

ON THE SCENE. Susan cold against the wall. Herbie in his chair, the moment trembling silently in the room. Separation.

179 ANOTHER ANGLE – FAVORING CALVIN

as she comes back to her chair, sits down, facing Herbie. Her face is changed now. We see almost prettiness there; not much, but a tinge; the prettiness engendered by hope. Two bright flushed spots in her cheeks, the eyes wider, the mouth trembling a bit.

CALVIN
You're mistaken. You must be.

HERBIE
He looks deeper than the skin and admires intellect in others. Mr. Milton Ashe is not the sort of man to marry a head of hair and a pair of eyes. He loves you.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

179 CONTINUED:

CALVIN
But he's never given even the slightest indication that—

HERBIE
Have you ever given him a chance?

Calvin stares at him thoughtfully for a moment, then makes a tiny, hesitant movement to touch his hand. The robot doesn't move. She draws back her hand.

CALVIN
(querulously)
A girl visited him here at the plant six months ago. Very pretty. Auburn hair and green eyes, very long legs. He spent all day with her, puffing out his chest, trying to explain how a robot was put together. Who was she?

HERBIE
(instantly)
Yes, I know the person you're referring to. She is his first cousin, and there is no romantic interest, I assure you.

She smiles almost vivaciously. She rises again.

CALVIN
(winsomely)
Now isn't that strange? That's exactly what I used to pretend to myself. Then it must be true.

She takes Herbie's cold, metal hand in both of hers. We can tell the robot weighs considerable because it is only with effort that she can lift his hand from his knee. She speaks in an urgent, husky whisper:

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
(earnestly)
Thank you, Herbie.
(beat)
Don't tell anyone about this. Let it be our secret . . . and thank you again . . . thank you so much, Herbie.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

179 CONTINUED: – 2

She smiles deeply, presses his hand, releases it, and goes. Herbie sits a moment as CAMERA MOVES AROUND HIM TO NEW ANGLE. Then he rises, picking up the volume clearly labeled *Physical Properties of Hyperatomic Motors* and replaces it in the bookcase. He draws out another book, and goes back to his chair, sits down, and opens it to read. The book is *Passion's Tender Fury*. The light in the room seems to dim and Herbie's photoelectric eyes glow brighter as we

DISSOLVE TO:

180 INT. VAC CHAMBER – CLOSEUP

on a mass of pinkish-bluish matter being bombarded by beams of multicolored light, like tracer bullets. CAMERA PULLS BACK to show it is a positronic brain in a middle stage of development. It sits in a multifaceted crystal case with the pin-tip nozzles in the ceiling of the case spurting out the colored tracer beams. CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS to show us other such vac chambers in a receding view down the distance in the U.S. RoboMek plant. Bogert and Ashe stand watching. Ashe rubs his eyes wearily. He looks like hell. Bogert looks neat and cool, as usual. A little martinet, faintly prissy.

ASHE
(testily)
I'm gonna collapse. If I don't get some sleep . . .

BOGERT
Lanning's pushing me.

ASHE
Push, shove, jam, jam, I don't give much of a damn, Norman! It's been a week and I'm *tired*! I'm getting paranoid, God forbid someone should find out about our little mind reader . . . and so far . . . *nothing*.
(beat)
I thought you said the positronic bombardment here in Vac Chamber D was the answer?

BOGERT
(yawns)
It is. I'm on the track. The problem is Lanning. The old fellow disagrees with
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOGERT (CONT'D.)
my analysis. He's out of date, still stuck in matrix mechanics.

ASHE
Why not ask Herbie and settle the whole affair?

BOGERT
(confused)
Ask the robot?

ASHE
(surprised)
Sure, why not? Didn't the old lady tell you?

BOGERT
You mean Calvin?

ASHE
(nods)
Li'l Susie, herself. The robot's a mathematical whiz. Does triple integrals in his head and eats up tensor analysis for chuckles.

BOGERT
(amazed)
Are you serious?

ASHE
(crosses his heart)
Honest to Peaches. The hook is that the Tin Woodman doesn't like math. Bores him. He'd rather read love novels. Big fan of Jane Eyre, from what Susie tells me.

BOGERT
What's this Susie business? And why hasn't she told this to Lanning or me?

Ashe makes some small adjustments on the control console beside the chamber and the color of the tracer lights alters drastically, but the bombardment continues.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ASHE
Well, she hasn't finished studying him. She likes to have it all bolted down before she lets out the big secret.

BOGERT
(testily)
She told *you*.

ASHE
Yeah, well . . . we sorta got to talking. I've been seeing a lot of her lately.
(frowns)
By the way, you notice anything weird about the way she's been acting lately?

BOGERT
She's using lipstick, if that's what you mean. Rather a ghastly vision, if you ask me.

ASHE
Hell, lipstick, rouge, eye shadow, kohl, even opened two buttons at the neck of her dress yesterday. But it's more than that. Way she talks . . . as if she were happy about something.

He shrugs.

BOGERT
(snidely)
Perhaps she's in love.

ASHE
Yeah, and as soon as I get my pinfeathers dry-cleaned I'll fly home for some sleep.
(beat)
Go talk to Herbie.

Bogert smiles thinly, and turns to go as CAMERA INTO LIGHTS in the vac chamber and we

CUT TO:

181 SAME AS 176 – CLOSE ON NOTE PAPER

A subliminal residue of tracer lights flashes off paper that we see

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

181 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

AS CAMERA PULLS BACK from paper is being held by Herbie. We hear Bogert's VOICE OVER before CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS to show him standing beside the robot.

BOGERT

So there we are. I'm told you understand these things, and while I don't really need any help on this, I'm asking more out of curiosity than anything else. Lanning disagrees with me. What do you think of my findings?

HERBIE

I see no mistake, sir.

BOGERT

(preening)

I don't suppose you could go any farther than that?

HERBIE

I wouldn't dare try, sir. You are a far more accomplished mathemetician than I and, well, I'd hate to second guess you.

BOGERT

(complacent)

I rather thought that would be the case.

(takes papers, turns to go, stops)

By the way . . .

HERBIE

Um, yes. I read your thoughts quite clearly, sir. As you're thinking, Dr. Lanning *is* well past seventy and seems more than a bit out of touch . . . and as you think, he's been director of the plant for thirty-eight years.

BOGERT

Amazing. Uh, hmmm. Well, then, you would know if he's planning to, uh . . .

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

181 CONTINUED: – 2

HERBIE
Resign? Yes, sir. I do know. In fact he already *has* resigned, and you're to be his successor.

BOGERT
(blown away)
Whaaat?

HERBIE
It hasn't taken effect, but he's signed the letter. He's merely waiting till the problem of, well, of *me* is settled.

Bogert smiles broadly. A shark that has eaten a big meal. He slaps the robot with a clang on his shoulder, turns to go.

BOGERT
Thanks, Herbie.

CUT TO:

182 TIME-PASSAGE SHOT – STOCK (MEASURE)

One of those time-lapse sequences of the sun passing across the horizon. But a special shot with the sun a blazing red eye, the kind of sun one sees only through pollution. Down it goes.

MATCH-DISSOLVE TO:

183 BOGERT'S OFFICE – MORNING

the sun going down in OVERLAPPING MATCH, into the glass front of a file case or the window of the office. CAMERA BACK to show Bogert asleep on his arm, fallen across the desk. More papers filled with mathematical doodlings than one can imagine, scattered all over the desk, the floor, the window ledge. Bogert rumpled, having worked through the night. The office door irises open and Lanning, looking starched but also weary, comes in. He walks around behind the sleeping Bogert, looking at the various pages exposed to cursory view. Finally, snorting in displeasure, he pokes Bogert's shoulder. Bogert wakes with a start, takes a moment to orient himself.

LANNING
(angrily)
Another night gone and nothing? Dammit, Norman, this is getting worse every minute. Now there're rumblings among the plant staff.

(CONTINUED)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

183 CONTINUED:

He picks up a piece of paper on which Bogert has been working when he fell asleep.

LANNING (CONT'D.)
This a new lead?

Bogert rips it from his hand angrily.

BOGERT
(sneers)
What's wrong with the old one?

LANNING
(shocked)
I told you that was a dead end.

BOGERT
And I say you're wrong. And I'm not alone. I have corroborative view.

LANNING
From whom?

BOGERT
From Herbie.

Lanning dismisses him with a cavalier wave of the hand; and Bogert's punctured ego at such treatment is evident in his face.

LANNING
Oh, so Calvin told you about the robot's way with mathematics. Genius. Really remarkable.

BOGERT
So you've been gulled, too. Calvin had better stick to robopsychology. I've checked Herbie on math and he can barely struggle through calculus.

LANNING
(livid)
I don't know what sort of testing you ran, but I've been putting Herbie through his paces most of the morning and *he* can do tricks with math *you've* never even heard of!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

183 CONTINUED: – 2

He pulls a sheet of paper from his inner jacket pocket, thrusts it at Bogert. Bogert studies it. Amazement suffuses his face.

BOGERT
Herbie did this?

LANNING
Right. And if you'll notice, he's been working on your time integration of Equation 22. It comes to the identical conclusion I reached, negating your findings.

Bogert crumples the paper and throws it against the wall. Now he's furious, and he's yelling at the old man.

BOGERT
(angrily)
Are you crazy? Have you *totally* lost your grasp? If you'll reread Mitchell's original paper on the Linger Effect in positronic bombard—

LANNING
(also shouting)
I don't have to! I told you in the beginning, over a week ago, that I didn't like the use of the Mitchell Equation . . . *and Herbie backs me on this!*
(beat, wildly)
And dammit, I'm the *director* here! Who the hell do you think you're talking to?!

BOGERT
You haven't any secrets from a telepathic robot, you desiccated old fossil. I know all about your resignation!

LANNING
(stunned)
My *what*?!?

BOGERT
(quietly)
And I'm the new director. I'm very aware of that, don't think I'm not. *I* give the orders around here, old man, *me!*

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LANNING
(red in the face)
You're suspended, you snot-nosed punk! You're relieved of all duties, clean out your desk . . . no, dammit, don't touch a thing! I'll have security lock off this office!

BOGERT
What's the use of all that, Lanning? I hold all the trumps. I *know* you've resigned. Herbie *told* me, and he got it straight out of your mind!

Lanning suddenly gets a contemplative look on his face. His rage is abruptly banked and the florid cast leaves his face. He speaks quietly.

LANNING
I want to speak to Herbie. He couldn't possibly have told you any such thing.
(beat)
You're either playing a very very dangerous game, Norman . . . or you've cracked under the strain. Either way, I'm calling your bluff.
(beat)
Come with me.

He starts for the door. Bogert follows, triumphant.

BOGERT
To see Herbie? Good! Very good!

And as the door opens and they go out we

HARD CUT TO:

184 INT. ASHE'S OFFICE – DAY

CLOSE ON A SKETCH of a house. Faintly Oriental in style, it is a hollow rectangle with curlicues in the center that are supposed to represent trees and gardens. We HEAR Milton Ashe's VOICE OVER before CAMERA PULLS BACK to show him and a radiant Susan Calvin leaning together over a drawing board.

ASHE
And in the center, that's the atrium, with bonsai and sculptured Japanese rock
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

184 CONTINUED:

ASHE (CONT'D.)
gardens. It's a lousy crude drawing but this is the dream house I've had in my mind for, oh, I don't know *how* long . . .

CALVIN
It's lovely, Milton. Just lovely. Very peaceful and strong, but quite logical in its way . . . *I've* always thought I'd like to—

She trails off. But Ashe isn't really listening. He goes on briskly, caught up in his dream.

ASHE
Of course I've got to wait for my vacation and settling this miserable puzzle about Herbie, but . . .
(he pauses, looks at her)
. . . can you keep a secret?

CALVIN
(lightly)
There are no secrets with Herbie around.

ASHE
(laughs)
I'm bursting to tell someone. And you're, well, you've come to be very close to me, Susan . . . I want you to know . . .

Susan looks as if she'll burst herself. She is radiant.

ASHE (CONT'D.)
I'm getting married!

Susan looks as if she's been hit with a ball peen hammer. She clutches the drawing table and goes white. The two hideous blotches of rouge on her cheeks—part of the ghastly misuse of makeup we've noticed since this scene began—the attempt of a woman in love to be what she is not—those two blotches of rouge now stand out like bloody stigmata. She starts to buckle at the knees. He grabs her.

ASHE (CONT'D.)
Hey! Sit down, what's the matter . . . ?

She hangs in his grasp, but manages to speak.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

184 CONTINUED: – 2

CALVIN
Married? You mean—

ASHE
Sure! About time, isn't it? You remember that woman who came to see me about six months ago, Sheilah? Well, we're going to—

(beat)
My God, you *are* sick . . . you've been night and day on Herbie . . .

She wrenches away from him, hand-walking across the wall toward the iris-door. She is babbling, looking horrible.

CALVIN
Headache! That's all, headache! I want to . . . to congratulate you . . . I hope you'll be . . . I'm glad . . .

She manages to palm open the iris, and still mumbling, stumbles out into the hall.

185 ARRIFLEX – WITH CALVIN – OUT-OF-FOCUS
thru
189 INTERIOR MONOLOGUE of CALVIN HEARD OVER as she lurches through the hallways, caroming off walls, down one long passage after another, colors shifting, her face wild and destroyed with anguish. CAMERA WITH HER in TILT-FRAME and SKEWED FOCUS.

CALVIN (FILTER OVER)
No! No! Herbie said . . . Herbie read his thoughts . . . he loves *me* . . . Herbie said Herbie read it . . . Herbie . . . Herbie . . .

She reaches the port to the HIGH SECURITY SECTION with its warnings. Her fingers play over the code panel to unseal the chamber to the white room where Herbie is kept. She falls through and her VOICE OVER CONTINUES:

CALVIN (FILTER OVER) (CONT'D.)
Tell me it's a dream . . . a bad dream . . . I'll wake up . . . he loves me . . . tell me . . .

CUT TO:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

190 INT. STUDY ROOM – SAME AS 176

CAMERA WHIRLING IN CLOSE CIRCLE.

HOLDING CALVIN and as she spins to find some way out of this nightmare the CAMERA PICKS UP HERBIE and then the two of them are in the maelstrom, their voices colliding.

CALVIN
Tell me it's a dream . . . I hurt . . . Herbie, tell me it's not real . . .
(beat)
Help me, Herbie . . . tell me . . .

HERBIE
You're dreaming all this, Dr. Calvin. It's not real. You'll wake up and he loves you . . . he loves you!

CUT TO:

191 ANOTHER ANGLE – FROM UP-ANGLE

as Susan Calvin suddenly wrenches herself out of the robot's grasp. She shoves against him, but he doesn't budge; but the force of her effort hurls her back, she slips, and falls to her knees. The robot moves to help her, but she screams at him:

CALVIN
(hysterical)
No! No, stop it! Get away from me! Get over there, get over there by the wall, stay away from me!

HERBIE
(pathetic)
I want to help.

CALVIN
What are you trying to do to me? What . . . what are you trying to *do* to me?

HERBIE
(mournful)
I want to help.

Susan crawls till she can rise . . . painful to watch.

CALVIN
Help? You want to help? By telling me this pain is a dream? By trying to push
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

191 CONTINUED:

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
me into schizophrenia.
(shouts)
This is no dream! What you told *me was the dream!*

Then she stands, and suddenly her face grows quiet. She looks at him.

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
Wait . . . now I *understand* . . . oh, God, it's so simple, so obvious . . .

Herbie takes a step toward her, his hands out in a sad little supplicating gesture . . . this great creature, helpless before the shattered woman.

HERBIE
(with horror in his voice)
I *had* to!

CALVIN
And I believed you. Because I *wanted* to believe you. Oh, God, how pathetic!

There is the SOUND O.S. of loud voices in the hall. Susan panics and tries to restrain her confusion, turns from the robot, who stands forlornly in the middle of the white room, hands still outstretched. As the door irises open, Susan goes to the far end, relatively unnoticed.

192 ON THE IRIS

as Bogert and Lanning boil through the opening. They don't even see Susan Calvin. They push close to the robot.

LANNING
Here now, Herbie! Listen to me!

HERBIE
Yes, Dr. Lanning.

LANNING
Have you discussed me with Dr. Bogert?

HERBIE
No, sir.

The crud-eating smile on Bogert's face vanishes. The answer came slowly, but clearly. Bogert shoves in closer.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

192 CONTINUED:

BOGERT
What's that? Repeat what you told me yesterday.

HERBIE
I said that—

He falls silent. Deep within him comes the SOUND of his metallic diaphragm vibrating in soft discords.

BOGERT
(roaring)
Didn't you say he had resigned! Answer me!

Lanning pushes him away, stands facing Bogert, as if protecting the robot that towers up behind him.

LANNING
Are you trying to bully him into lying?

BOGERT
You heard him, Lanning. He started to say yes and got scared of you. Get out of my way! I want the truth out of him, do you understand?

Lanning won't move out of the way, he's holding his territorial imperative; but he puts out a hand to stop Bogert, and turns to Herbie.

LANNING
Well? Have I resigned? Yes or no?

The sound of malfunction inside Herbie rises slightly. He just stares. There is the faintest trace of a negative movement of the robot's head and CAMERA COMES IN TO CU but nothing more. Just the SOUNDS of Herbie running rough inside. CAMERA BACK.

BOGERT
What's wrong with you, have you gone mute? Can't you speak, you double-crossing metal monstrosity?

HERBIE
(quick answer)
I can speak.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOGERT
Then answer the question! Didn't you *tell* me Lanning had resigned? Hasn't he resigned . . . ?

Again, nothing but silence which HOLDS for several BEATS and in that silence we suddenly HEAR a high-pitched, almost hysterical laugh. From Susan Calvin. Bogert and Lanning spin, and see her for the first time.

BOGERT (CONT'D.)
(furiously)
You here? What's so funny?

Susan walks to them, joins the trio, looks up at Herbie with hatred in her eyes, her mouth tight, her fists clenched. But her voice is normal, controlled. *Too* controlled: dangerously.

CALVIN
Nothing's funny. Not a solitary thing.

She raises a hand as if to strike the robot, then slowly, almost agonizingly *opens the fist* and lays it on the robot's metal chest. Herbie trembles for an instant. Can it be that this massive tonnage of thinking metal is frightened of the slight woman before him? She looks at him steadily.

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
(voice not quite natural)
Three of the world's greatest experts in robotics were conned in the same way.
(beat)
But it isn't *funny*.

This time the look that passes between Bogert and Lanning is one of utter confusion, raised eyebrows.

LANNING
What do you mean, "conned"? Is something wrong with him?

CALVIN
No, nothing's wrong with him . . . it's wrong with *us*.
(suddenly screams at Herbie.)
Get away from me! Go to the other end of the room and turn your face to the wall and don't let me look at you!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

192 CONTINUED: – 3

Herbie cringes before her attack and stumbles away at a clattering trot. He goes to the corner like a small child who's been bad, and turns his face into the angle of walls and stands immobile as Bogert and Lanning watch in utter amazement. She spins on them and with high sarcasm speaks to them.

CALVIN
Surely you know the fundamental First Law of Robotics?
(presses on, high dudgeon)
A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human to come to harm.

193 thru 199 INTERCUTS – CLOSE ON BOGERT, LANNING & CALVIN from face to face as the mystery is unriddled.

BOGERT
Harm? What harm?

CALVIN
(shrilly, wild)
Why—any kind of harm! Loving creatures, protecting us from any kind, all kinds of harm: hurt feelings, deflation of ego. What about the blasting of a person's hopes, destruction of one's dreams? Is that injury, is that harm?

LANNING
(frowns)
But what would a robot know about—

He catches himself, with a gasp. His eyes widen.

CALVIN
(bitterly triumphant)
Oh, you've caught on at last, have you? *This* robot reads minds! Do you suppose it doesn't know everything about mental injury? Do you suppose if you asked it a question it wouldn't give *exactly* the answer you want to hear? Wouldn't any other answer hurt us, and wouldn't dear good-loving Herbie *know* that?!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

193 CONTINUED:
thru
199

BOGERT
Oh my God.

CALVIN
(snaps)
I take it you asked if Lanning had resigned. He read your mind and knew that's what you *wanted* to hear, so that's what he told you. You poor fool, Bogert.

LANNING
That's why it couldn't answer just now. An answer would've hurt one of us.

200 WIDE-ANGLE SHOT – THE ROOM & SCENE

as all three turn to look at the robot, still in the corner.

CALVIN
(softly, bitterly)
He knew all this. That . . . that devil knows everything about us: our stupid desires, our venalities, our fragile egos . . . knows everything.
(beat)
Including what went wrong in his assembly.

LANNING
That's where you're wrong. He doesn't know what went wrong; I asked him.

201 3-SHOT – CLOSER ANGLE

CALVIN
Big deal. You don't *really* want him to give you the answer; it would puncture your ego—yours, too, Bogert—to have a machine do what you couldn't. He *knows* that . . . he read your little minds!

BOGERT
He told me he knew very little about mathematics. He told me I was a superior mathematician . . .

He stops, embarrassed. He knows what that means now. Lanning suddenly starts laughing. At Bogert. Now he gets the whole picture,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

201 CONTINUED:

(CONT'D.)

and he's laughing at Bogert's humiliation. It may not be noble, his laughter, but it *is* a tension-release. Bogert looks as if he'd like to bite off his own tongue . . . and then kill Herbie. Susan isn't caught up in the laughing, however. She's almost hellbent on wrenching as much pain from this encounter as she can . . . a form of self-flagellation.

CALVIN

I'll ask him. A solution by him won't hurt my ego.

(raises voice, cold, imperative)

Herbie! Come here. Now!

The robot turns and shuffles over, head downcast. CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS to include the robot and the other three.

CALVIN

Do you know at exactly what point in your assembly an extraneous factor was introduced or an essential one omitted that made you telepathic?

HERBIE

Yes.

CALVIN

All right, then. Give!

But there is a peculiar, cunning look on Susan's face. A look we've never seen before, almost malevolent. And it seems apropos that in the face of that look Herbie says nothing. He shuffles from foot to foot, but will not speak. The SOUNDS of malfunctioning come from inside him again.

CALVIN (CONT'D.)

(sweetly)

Why don't you answer, Herbie?

The robot moves his hands aimlessly, then blurts out:

HERBIE

I can't! You know I can't! Dr. Bogert and Dr. Lanning don't want me to!

CALVIN

They want the solution.

HERBIE

But not from me!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

201 CONTINUED: – 2

LANNING
(breaks in)
Don't be foolish, Herbie. We *do* want you to tell us.

Bogert nods agreement. Susan smiles a hard, tight, nasty smile. She knows what she's doing.

HERBIE
What's the use of saying that? Don't you think I can see past the words? Down deep in your minds you don't want me to! I'm a machine, not human: you can't lose to me without being hurt, your egos being crushed. That's deep in your minds, and it can't be erased. I *can't* give you the solution!

Lanning flares up again. He almost swings on the robot, but its bulk and obvious imperviousness stops him.

LANNING
(furious)
Dammit, we *created* you! We're your *masters*, damn you! Tell us!

The robot turns its head in what would be a painful movement if it were human.

LANNING (CONT'D.)
(gets control)
I'm sorry. That was uncalled for. We'll leave. Tell Calvin.

HERBIE
It wouldn't make any difference. You'd know the answer came from me.

202 CLOSE ON SUSAN CALVIN

Her face has now solidified in an almost cruel expression. We cannot be sure of that interpretation, but it's not a face that contains love and compassion. She speaks to Herbie slowly, very logically.

CALVIN
But you understand that Dr. Lanning and Dr. Bogert want that solution, don't you, Herbie?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

203 2-SHOT – SUSAN CALVIN & HERBIE

HERBIE
By their own efforts!

CALVIN
(inexorably)
But they want it, and the fact that you have it and won't give it to them *hurts them* . . . you see that, don't you?

HERBIE
(buzzing inside)
Yes! Yes, I see that . . . oh!

CALVIN
And if you tell them it will hurt them, too . . . ?

HERBIE
Yes! Yes! Oh . . .

CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS as we see Susan advancing on Herbie, slow step by step. Herbie backs up before her. It is a bizarre scene: this great creature capable of crushing steel, pained and fleeing before the remorseless logic of the tiny woman.

204 INTERCUT – BOGERT & LANNING

as they watch the stalking before them, in frozen bewilderment. Susan's VOICE O.S. drones on carefully, relentlessly.

CALVIN (O.S.)
You can't tell them because that would hurt . . . and you can't hurt . . . you mustn't hurt. But if you *don't* tell them, you hurt them, so you *must* tell them . . .

CUT BACK TO:

205 SAME AS 203

Susan still advancing on Herbie, driving him back toward the wall not with force but with logic . . . endless, remorseless logic. The robot is now emitting a keening whine from within.

CALVIN
And if you tell them you will hurt them and you *mustn't* hurt them, so you can't tell them . . . but if you don't, you hurt, so you must . . . but if you do, you hurt,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

205 CONTINUED:

CALVIN (CONT'D.)
so you mustn't . . . but if you don't, you hurt, so you must . . . but if you do, you hurt . . .

Herbie bumps roughly against the wall, tries to slide off to one side, but Susan is there, speaking, speaking, always speaking, running the impossible logic of it at him. He turns this way and that, cannot escape, then drops to his knees. His face is at a level with hers now, and she won't stop. He shrieks.

HERBIE
Stop! Close your mind! It's full of pain and frustration and hate! Don't hate me so, please! I didn't mean any harm! I tried to help! I told you what you wanted to hear . . . I had to! Oh, please . . . please . . . !

But she won't stop. She keeps it up, speaking softly, slowly, but with venom.

CALVIN
You must tell them, but if you do you hurt, so you mustn't; but if you don't, you hurt, so you must—but if you do, you hurt . . . you hurt . . . you hurt.

And Herbie *screams*! A sound we've never heard on this Earth before. A SOUND THAT CHILLS US, that contains in it all the pain of inarticulate creatures senselessly murdered, small things crushed underfoot, seals bashed with ball bats, whales punctured by exploding harpoons, cows having their throats slit, millions going to the furnaces, memories of the rack and the boot and the Inquisition. A SOUND OF HORROR and ABSOLUTE, UTTER AGONY!

And it goes on and on. And rises till it fills the room and our minds and our eyes squeeze shut with the anguish in it. And then . . . suddenly . . . it stops. And the silence is even more piercing, more electrifying, more deadly.

And Herbie pitches forward in one smooth, sharp movement. Just missing Susan as he falls over with a crash, lies there with his face turned toward Susan Calvin, expressionless but somehow pathetic and hopeless. Dead.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

206 FULL SHOT – FEATURING BOGERT & LANNING

Calvin and the dead robot in the near b.g.

BOGERT
(awed)
He's dead!

CALVIN
(laughs wildly suddenly)
No, not dead—just insane. You can scrap him now, because he'll never speak again. I've solved your dilemma!

Lanning moves in and kneels beside the robot. He opens the panel in the back and fiddles for a moment. He closes it and looks up at Calvin. CAMERA IN THROUGH THIS to HOLD Lanning's face. He is looking at her with new awareness.

LANNING
(respectful)
You did that on purpose.

207 ANOTHER ANGLE – FAVORING CALVIN

Her nostrils flare, her head is up. She won't back off.

CALVIN
(defiantly)
What if I did? You can't help it now.
(beat)
He deserved it.

BOGERT
You forced him to suicide. You killed him.

CALVIN
Sue me. Take it out of my pay.

Lanning and Bogert look at her with a new respect compounded of fear and respect for her passion; and clearly, a sense that they have misunderstood this woman totally, that she is far deeper, far stronger, far more purposeful than they have ever known.

LANNING
(softly, carefully)
I never thought you were much like your father; I see now I was wrong.
(beat)
I remember . . .

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

207 CONTINUED:

CALVIN
(cuts in hard)
Memory is a wonderful thing.

He stares at her for a long moment. Then turns to go. He passes Bogert, who has not moved, is frozen, staring at the tableau, hearing everything that's being said and not really grasping much of it. Lanning takes his arm.

LANNING
Come along, Norman. We'll go to my office and sit and breathe deeply, and then we'll have a drink and talk about futures.

Bogert is gently tugged, but remains standing there. He stares at Calvin, who returns his stare with hauteur and implacable strength. Lanning sighs, releases Bogert's arm, and goes. As the door irises closed behind him, Bogert speaks very very softly, with wonder:

BOGERT
What must that robot have told you . . . ?!?

Then he, too, turns and goes, leaving Susan alone. With Herbie.

208 CLOSE ANGLE ON CALVIN – SHOT FROM ABOVE

looking down at the dead Herbie. She stands there a second, then abruptly kicks the side of the head just below the emptily staring photoelectric eye. A smear of oxidized metal and shoe sole scuff is left on the otherwise perfect metal. One word escapes her lips, with venom, with viciousness:

CALVIN
(full of hate)
Liar!

CUT TO:

209 HIGH ANGLE – SHOOTING STRAIGHT DOWN

on the sprawled metal figure and the woman standing over her victim. As CAMERA COMES DOWN SLOWLY Susan drops to her knees beside the creature and begins rubbing in a pathological circle at the smear she has put on the metal. She murmurs the same word, over and over, but now with pain and loss and fear and frustration and hopelessness, over and over . . .

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

209 CONTINUED:

CALVIN
(pathetic)
Liar . . . liar . . . liar . . . liar . . .

She keeps rubbing till it almost turns into the sort of caress one would bestow on a favored pet crushed by a car. The touch. Circular. Over and over and over, as she says that word again and again and again and WE HEAR the WORD *LIAR* meld into ECHO CHAMBER OVER as CAMERA COMES DOWN AND DOWN and FOCUS SMEARS and we

DISSOLVE TO:

210 INT. CRYONIC CRYPT – ON BRATENAHL & BOGERT

CLOSE ON FACE IN THE MOISTURED INTERIOR OF CRYPT and we continue to HEAR the ECHO of Susan Calvin saying "Liar . . . liar . . . liar" over and over, FADING UNDER until it's a mere whisper, and we are back in the present-time.

BOGERT
I never knew what was behind it all. Not actually. But I suppose I pieced it together from interior data.
(beat)
So you ask me was she Byerley's mistress, and I say . . . I don't know. But I doubt it. I don't think she was capable of deep affection, for anyone, after the thing with Ashe.

BRATENAHL
(disappointed)
And that's all of it?

BOGERT
(umbrage)
Well, you *said* you wanted back-fence gossip.

BRATENAHL
Yes, but I was sort of hoping for a clue to the link between Calvin and Byerley. A great deal depends on my getting to the bottom of this . . .

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

210 CONTINUED:

BOGERT
Ah . . . ! Do I detect that the fragile barque of your life is being shattered on the cruel reefs of Susan Calvin?

BRATENAHL
So that's all you have to tell me . . . ?

BOGERT
Oh, my. Now I've put you off with my viperous tongue. Yes, Mr. Whoozis, that's all I have to tell you.

BRATENAHL
Then I guess I'll be going.

BOGERT
Uh, not just yet you won't.

BRATENAHL
Pardon?

BOGERT
Our bargain. I tell you about Susan and Milton Ashe: you fill me in on the teleportation breakthrough and changes in the world.

BRATENAHL
(sighs wearily)
Right.
(beat)
Well, when Donovan and Powell solved that spaceship problem with the robots and discovered that the only way to beat Einstein's space-time equations was to die and get reborn when the ship made transition, it was only a matter of time till U.S. RoboMek found a way to eliminate the ship . . .

211 BOOM SHOT – FULL SCENE

as Bratenahl speaks the PRECEDING SPEECH OVER the CAMERA PULLS UP AND BACK to give us a full view of the cryonic chamber, immense and high-ceilinged. His VOICE GROWS DIMMER as CAMERA CONTINUES BACK AND UP and we are left with the view of the lone man, speaking to the frozen crypt and we DISSOLVE THRU TO:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

212 EXT. BERNICE'S CONAPT – NIGHT – SIGMA DRACONIS 5

a gigantic structure on an empty plain, tetrahedronal in shape—built on the concepts of Paolo Soleri—a superstructure that can house 170,000 people.

There are three moons in the night sky. CAMERA MOVES IN on the Soleri-like condominium arcology, toward one window among millions, the condo apartment of Bernice Jolo, as we

DISSOLVE THRU TO:

213 INT. BERNICE'S CONAPT – NIGHT

As with Bratenahl's own arcology conapt (condominium-apartment) in Scene 139, Bernice's quarters here on Sigma Draconis 5 are an "environment construct," in the mode desired by the inhabitant's secret fantasy of the ideal personal living space. Bernice Jolo has opted for a SHADOW ROOM. It is a gray ovoid shape wavering, altering at the edges. Shadows play across the dim interior. Some seem like waves of fog, others seem to be human in shape, and some are just abstract shapes that change from moment to moment. Colors alter. And music dominates as various shadows take predetermined prominence over others. At one point the shadows seem to be a group of alien musicians, playing odd instruments, and alien MUSIC FILTERS IN OVER. Then they recede and the SOUND OF NIGHT BREEZES lift into the room, ruffling the hair of Bernice Jolo, lying naked in the warm, central pool that dominates the living space. The pool has soft sides that mold to her shape as she reclines against them. It is restful, but Bernice is not subdued; she seems anxious, distraught. Naked, she rises from the pool and CAMERA MOVES ACROSS THE ROOM with her as she goes to an iris in the wall. The room tries to hold her, to captivate her with more frantic shadows that converge on her as she nears the iris. She turns on the room with annoyance.

BERNICE
(to the room)
Fade out . . . stop annoying me!

The room goes dead at once, and lights up to reveal a soft egg-white nothingness, all the magic gone. She passes her hand in front of the iris and the door swirls open. Inside, a huge semi-circular screen is being watched by Bratenahl. He sits morosely, totally absorbed, in a formfit chair. He is watching the Central comm feed tapes we've seen before. Tapes of Byerley and Calvin. He is watching, as she enters, the scene of Calvin from year 2032 we saw in Scene 8 (same as forthcoming Scene 272): Calvin and the "Lenny" robot in U.S. Robots' Test Area Nine. Bernice goes into the room, and stands behind him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

214 INT. VIEWROOM – ON THE SCREEN

we have a huge panoramic of the scene with Calvin and Lenny. CAMERA BACK to HOLD Bratenahl in the chair, fist against cheek, Bernice behind him, naked, concerned, watching *him.*

BERNICE
(softly)
Bob?

He pays no attention. He is riveted.

BERNICE (CONT'D.)
Bob! Please . . . you've been at it for three hours.

He notices her but doesn't turn around. He speaks to the room:

BRATENAHL
(wearily)
Freeze it. Gimme some light.

The scene on the screen freezes, Calvin touching Lenny's metal hide. The room brightens with soft light. He reaches up a hand and she takes it, kisses his fingers.

BERNICE
(troubled)
Should I be worrying about you?

BRATENAHL
(also deeply troubled)
I think so.
(beat)
Maybe I'd better face it; this is dead cold end. I've played out every way of going and I'm still nowhere.

BERNICE
Bogert?

BRATENAHL
Interesting, but not what I was going for. I've run this tape over and over . . . and I keep getting the feeling the answer is here *some*where, but I'm just not sharp enough to see it.

Bernice comes around and sits at his feet. He looks exhausted.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Dammit, I feel as if I *know* her!

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

214 CONTINUED:

BERNICE
Then do the piece on her from what you've already got. My God, Bob, what does Rowe want from you? If it hadn't been for you, he'd never even know she was in Brazil.

(beat)
He ought to be satisfied with that!

BRATENAHL
That grisly sonofabitch stopped pickin' green apples like that when he was ten. No . . . he lusts for the *big* story. He wants to know for bottom-line dead certain if old Susan Calvin was *fucking* Stephen Byerley.

BERNICE
Nice man.

BRATENAHL
Not nice. He's got my matrix, he's got my job, he's got my life in a lockbox. He's got a knot around my throat.

BERNICE
I can't stand to see you like this.

BRATENAHL
(sighs, slumps)
I wish to God I could stop this, just forget it.

BERNICE
Do it, then! Just *do* it. Tell Rowe to go to hell.

BRATENAHL
I can't . . . I have to know . . . all about her.

BERNICE
Why do I feel jealous of an eighty-two-year-old woman?

BRATENAHL
(woefully)
For the first time in my life I have no

(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
control over what I'm doing, where I'm going. I'm being jammed and run!

BERNICE
Why you? Why *now*?

BRATENAHL
I think it's because the status quo has changed. There's something different now . . .

BERNICE
Which is?

He rises, steps around her, goes to the screen, puts his hand on the image of Susan Calvin frozen there.

BRATENAHL
Stephen Byerley is dead.

She stares at him, uncomprehending.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
He isn't around to protect her.

BERNICE
Protect her? From what?

Bratenahl shrugs. He doesn't know the answer. She rises, comes to him. They stand with arms around each other.

BERNICE (CONT'D.)
(gently)
I'm still trying to get us in to see her. It'll work out.
(beat)
You hungry?

He shakes his head. Leaves her, walks around the room. Stops. Stares at the frozen image.

BRATENAHL
I'll come in, in a little while. I just want to go through this stuff another couple times. Why don't you get some sleep.

She stares at him a moment, then nods resignedly, helpless to pull him out of it. She goes to the iris, which swirls open. She stands in the doorway for a moment as he sinks back into the formfit. As
(MORE)

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

214 CONTINUED: – 3

(CONT'D.)

he speaks to the room, Bernice already forgotten, she goes out, and the iris swirls down.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
(to the room)
Down the light. Run it again.

CUT TO:

215 INT. BERNICE'S CONAPT – ANGLE ON POOL – NIGHT

The walls are fleece-cloud soft with stars showing here and there. Bernice lies sleeping, naked, in the pool. But she floats on the surface, on a blue mist cloud that supports her. CAMERA IN on her sleeping face as a hand reaches into the frame and touches her shoulder. She starts suddenly. CAMERA ANGLE WIDENS to show Bratenahl crouched at the edge of the pool, urgently looking at her.

BRATENAHL
Don't be scared. It's just me.

BERNICE
(groggily)
What's the matter?

BRATENAHL
Something important. I need your help.

BERNICE
(rising)
What is it?

BRATENAHL
It's so incredible, I don't believe it . . . I think I've got the answer . . .

She comes out of the pool, shivers. The mist dissipates. She walks toward a panel on the sideboard. Buttons and readout slots on the panel.

BERNICE
Let me get a wrap.

She punches out a code and a folded garment comes zipping through a slot. She shakes it out. A soft, azure-colored peignoir. She slips into it. Bratenahl starts back for the room where he was watching the tapes when we last saw him. The wall irises open. He enters. She follows, still a little sleepy.

216 INT. VIEWROOM – SAME AS 214

The wall scene is blank. Bratenahl motions her to the formfit chair. He stands near the wall, excited.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

216 CONTINUED:

BRATENAHL
(to the room)
Run that last one again. Very slowly.

The wall flickers and runs the scene of Byerley on the deck of a trimaran, looking youthful and outdoorsy. Byerley's face in EXTREME CU.

Bratenahl walks to the wall, his shadow across the scene.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Freeze that! Right there!

Byerley's face in EXTREME CU. Bratenahl puts his hand on the image of Byerley, just under one of the eyes. He stares very closely.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
(to Bernice)
Okay. Now come take a close look at his face. The resolution's perfect, you can see every pore.

She comes up and looks as closely as he.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Okay. Now rerun that footage of Byerley and Calvin's tour of the EarthCentral Computer Complex . . . the 2036 sequence . . .

The WALL CHANGES INSTANTLY. It shows a HIGH SHOT LOOKING DOWN into a shaft filled with computer facings. As if a mine shaft had been used to stack computerized elements down to the center of the Earth. CAMERA COMES DOWN FAST to a high-ceilinged tunnel lit as well as high noon. The CAMERA RACES FORWARD to a group of men walking through the computer complex. It comes to CU on Byerley and goes past.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
Back up to the closeup on Byerley and freeze it.

The room complies. Byerley in huge size. Bratenahl and Bernice stare at the face clearly, closely. He touches the face where he touched the last one: the smooth skin under the eye.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
(to room)
How many years between this footage and the stuff on the trimaran?

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOICE OF THE ROOM
Thirteen Old Earth years, sir.

BRATENAHL
Has any of it been retouched?

VOICE OF THE ROOM
No, sir. It is raw footage, minimally edited for continuity.

BRATENAHL
Okay. Split-frame, and give me the Byerley closeups from both sequences at the same time.

The wall flickers and now we have both CLOSEUPS of Stephen Byerley, thirteen years apart, side-by-side. Bratenahl nods as if convinced, waves a hand at the wall and moves back so Bernice can see clearly.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
(to Bernice)
There it is.

BERNICE
(confused)
Yes, there it is.
(beat)
There *what* is?

BRATENAHL
You tell me. What do you see?

BERNICE
The President.

BRATENAHL
Two views, separated by thirteen years of the most demanding job the world has ever known . . . first President of the Galactic Federation.

BERNICE
Yes . . . *and?*

Bratenahl is impatient, excited, overwhelmed with what he thinks he's discovered. He doesn't know how to convey it to her. He turns back to the screen, speaks to the room.

(CONTINUED:)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BRATENAHL
Hey, dip into the comm feed and run me up a closeup of any news footage you've got on Dr. Bernice Jolo, two tight shots, side by side, make them . . . oh . . . five years apart . . . or more.

The screen goes blank, flickers with waiting time, then suddenly flashes on split-screen CLOSEUPS of Bernice. The one on the left has a legend 2071 on it; the one on the right bears the legend 2076. Bernice squeals.

BERNICE
No fair! I'd just come off a three hour trepanning session!

BRATENAHL
Look at them! Five years apart, just *five*, not thirteen . . . *five!*

She steps closer, examines herself.

BRATENAHL (CONT'D.)
(to room)
Put back the Byerley closeups.

Byerley is back. Now Bernice is intently studying them. Suddenly her mouth opens in a gasp. She turns back to Bratenahl.

BERNICE
He didn't change! He's . . .

BRATENAHL
(jubilant)
He's the same. *Exactly* the same. Not one wrinkle. Under the eyes, that's where it tells first . . . especially for a man saddled with that kind of constant pressure.
(beat)
Damn! Damn! No darkness under the eyes, no puffiness, no wrinkles! Nothing!

BERNICE
Bob . . . you don't think he was . . .

He grabs her, swings her around; he's knocked out with joy.

BRATENAHL
I do! I *know* he was. The sonofabitch was *immortal*!

CONCLUDED NEXT ISSUE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

Late word on a possible appearance by the Good Doctor. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, & a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (business) envelope) at Duke St. #D-10, Alexandria VA 22304. The hot line is (703) 823-3117. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Early evening's a good time to phone cons. For free listings, tell me about your con 6 months ahead. When writing, enclose an SASE. Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge making music.

OCTOBER, 1987

9-11—**RoVaCon.** For info, write: **Box 117, Salem VA 24153.** Or call: **(703 389-9400** (10 am to 10 pm; not collect). Con will be held in: Salem VA (if city omitted, same as in address) at Civic Center. Guests will include: Ben ("Colony") Bova, Hal ("Mission of Gravity") Clement, and Star Trek guests.

9-11—**NovaCon.** Yorktown Hotel, York PA. S. R. Delany. Tentative: A*S*I*M*O*V, Jeppson, Springer.

9-11—**ConClave.** Hilton, Southfield MI. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, S. Simmons, SF folksinger J. Shoji.

9-11—**ConStellation.** Holiday Inn Research Park, Huntsville AL. J. ("Superman") Schwartz. Low key.

9-11—**NonCon.** Edmonton Inn, Edmonton AB. Barb Hambly, George Barr, E. Vonarburg, Janis Svilpis.

9-11—**ArmadilloCon. (512) 443-3491/8-3630.** Wyndham So. Hotel, Austin TX. B. Sterling, B. Meacham, M. Olson, Pat Cadigan, O. S. Card, W. Gibson, R. Rucker, L. Shiner, H. Waldrop. Wow—Cyberpunk City!

16-18—**ICon. (319) 396-6487.** Rodeway Inn, Coralville IA. G. Cook, J. & G. Haldeman, Dick Spelman.

16-18—**NecronomiCon. (813) 677-6347 & 973-0038.** Tampa FL. Frederik Pohl, O. S. Card, E. A. Hull.

16-18—**SoonerCon.** Cent. Plaza Hotel, Oklahoma City OK. R. Bailey, D. Cherry, L. LeHew, D. Harris.

16-18—**ByCon.** Holiday Inn Market Sq., Ottawa ON. By the Bytown Futurists. Emphasis on science.

23-25—**NotJustAnotherCon, RSO 104, U. Mass., Amherst MA 01003. (413) 545-1924.** Vinge, Bova.

29-Nov. 1—**World Fantasy Con, Box 22817, Nashville TN 37202.** Piers Anthony, artist Kelly Freas, Charles L. Grant, Karl Edward Wagner, Val & Ron Lindahn. Join NOW at $50 (will sell out in advance).

30-Nov. 1—**DreamCon, 1321 N. S. E. Everett Mall Way #103, Everett WA 98208.** T. Brooks, Pini's.

30-Nov. 1—**PumpKon, Box 3437, McCormack Stn., Boston MA 02101.** Somerville MA. Halloween party.

30-Nov. 1—**UFO InConceivable, Box 1771, Madison WI 53701.** Less serious than February's WisCon.

30-Nov. 1—**FilkCon, %OVFF, Box 14078, Columbus OH 43214. (614) 451-3154.** SF folksinging con.

NOVEMBER, 1987

6-8—**WindyCon, Box 432, Chicago IL 60690.** The big Chicagoland SF convention of the year.

13-15—**PhilCon, %Phila. SF Soc., Box 8303, Philadelphia, PA 19101.** Philly's big annual SF con.

SEPTEMBER, 1988

1-5—**NoLaCon II, 921 Canal #831, New Orleans LA.70112. (504) 525-6008.** WorldCon $60 in 1987.

AUGUST, 1989

31-Sep. 4—**Noreascon 3, Box 46, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Boston MA. The 1989 WorldCon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

2451 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

3780 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $5.98

★**3491** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $4.98

2733 Pub. ed. $18.95
Club ed. $6.98

★**2709** Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $4.98

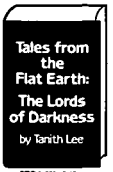
0992 Dragonsong; Dragonsinger; Dragondrums. Comb. pub. ed. $38.85
Club ed. $7.98

★**2345 The Moment of the Magician; The Paths of the Perambulator; The Time of the Transference.** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98

3426 Pub. ed. $18.95
Club ed. $6.50

3673 Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $7.98

5520 The Sleeping Dragon; The Sword and the Chain; The Silver Crown. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

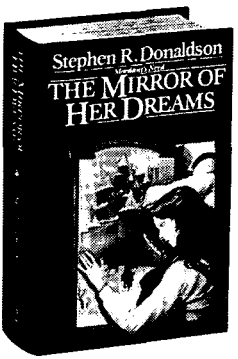


★**3731 Night's Master; Death's Master; Delusion's Master.** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

★**3715 Delirium's Mistress; Night's Sorceries.** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98

3475 Pub. ed. $15.95
Club ed. $4.98

3764 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $5.98



Yours FREE.

And take 4 more for $1 with membership.

▲ Exclusive hardcover edition.
★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

How the Club Works:

You'll receive your choice of any 4 books shown for only $1 (plus shipping and handling) and a free copy of *The Mirror of Her Dreams* after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing. The FREE book will be yours to keep whether or not you remain a member.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $4.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—UP TO 65% OFF. The Club offers more than 400 books to choose from. Each volume printed on our special presses is produced on high-quality acid-free paper. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Dept. CS-699, Garden City, NY 11535

Please accept my application for membership. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below plus my FREE book and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices in the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

FREE BOOK #3350	1.	2.	3.	4.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____

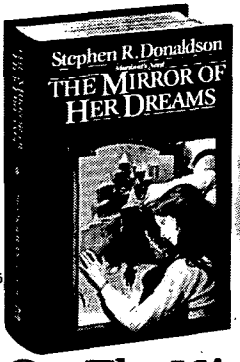
The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

34-S055

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Step into the mirror...

and enter a world of magic, treachery and passion!



Get The Mirror of Her Dreams FREE with membership.

★ 3236 Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $9.98

3160 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $5.98

1743 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $5.98

3566 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $5.98

3657 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $4.98

1362 Pub. ed. $14.95
Club ed. $5.98

†3541 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $5.98

3723 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $4.98

3565 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $5.50

★ 3384 Pub. ed. $15.95
Club ed. $4.98

3772 Pub. ed. $14.95
Club ed. $4.98

0075 The First 5 Amber Novels. 2 vols. Comb. pub. ed. $32.30
Club ed. $8.98

1420 Includes the First, Second and Third Books. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98

0752 Elric of Melnibone; The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; The Weird of the White Wolf. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $6.98

1172 The Vanishing Tower; The Bane of the Black Sword; Stormbringer. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98

3509 Myth-ing Persons; Little Myth Marker; M.Y.T.H. Inc. Link. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $6.98

3540 The Awakeners: Northshore; The Awakeners: Southshore. Comb. pub. ed. $30.90
Club ed. $6.98

2584 Pub. ed. $15.95
Club ed. $6.98

And take 4 more for $1

with membership.

See other side for additional selections.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

34-S055

†Copyright © 1988 Paramount Pictures Corporation All Rights Reserved
STAR TREK is a Registered Trademark of Paramount Pictures Corporation

▲ Exclusive hardcover edition.
★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED